Sevens

10 - Wait, We're Continuing this, Tenth Generation?

Wai

Prologue

The temple in Zayin's capital.

That temple that differed little from a castle looked as if it were shimmering when bathed under the light of the sun. A blue sky spread out, and around it gathered the citizens of the capital.

It was a place in which a war took place not too long ago. But now it had managed to regain its composure.

In that flurried space, the Holy Knights were formally declared the official knight brigade, and at the same time, the Divine knights were broken up.

As the Holy Maiden, Aura Zayin was trying to construct a new system of rule.

And in the ceremony, the ones who'd done meritorious service this time around were lined up.

But the Vice-Captain of the Holy Knights, Creit-san was wending a discontent look to his side. Where his eyes fell, Albano-san was lined with a grinning expression.

Albano-san's subordinates were lined beside him, and they were here because their work behind the scene had been evaluated highly.

Having been oblivious to their work, Creit-san looked quite irritated.

Wearing armor that served in appearance alone, I cautioned Creit-san in a quiet voice.

"Creit-san, we're in the middle of a ceremony."

A vexed Creit-san looked ahead, and scolded me.

"Lyle-kun, why did you invite Albano along? That one has no incentive, and his loyalty equates to nothing."

The earnest Creit-san was definitely skilled. But if he was going to

be managing a knight brigade, he held the fatal flaw of being too straightforward.

In order to compensate for him, I thought Albano-san was a necessity.

“Regardless, I invited him. And wouldn’t back-stage jobs prove hard for you? Like investigation or snooping around rumors, there are quite a few important jobs we’ll need him to do.”

“That’s exactly the point! Leaving something like that to that man…”

During the ceremony, Creit-san was displeased from beginning to end.

I was quite busy with setting up Zayin’s new order. We had few civil officials. The ones we had were a group of newbies.

On top of that, we dissolved the Divine Knight Brigade, so we would have to form a new unit for that.

(… We don’t have enough time. It’s impossible. If I was to see this through to the end, it would take years’ worth of time.)

In the Jewel hung around my neck, the Skills of my ancestors were recorded.

I’m grateful that those ancestors put in their advice, but recently, there was something that caught my curiosity.

(Even so, they’ve been quite quiet as of late.)

Normally, they were more than loud enough, but recently, unless I called out from my side they wouldn’t give a response.

It made me curious, but I was too busy to ask their reasons.

And I was trying to move the plans to the next stage.

(Now then, next is Selva. Lorphys’ movements are dull, but will it be fine?)

By swiftly attaining victory in Zayin, we were trying to alter Lorphys’ objectives towards maintaining the status quo.

(Hah, looks like I'll have to make a move on my side.)

❼

Once the ceremony ended, I went right into processing documents in my room.

The ones assisting me were Novem, Miranda, Monica, and Clara. At times like these, Aria and Shannon, and Eva and May weren't of much help.

A mountain of paperwork was piled atop the desk, and as I went through them, I heard the Fourth's voice.

『Hmm, that's an important one, so put some money into it. Oh, that one's no good. It isn't a calculation error, it's intentionally been misreported. The one who drew it up is incompetent. Make note of his name, and demote him. The next one is… ah, that one's got a high priority, but it's impossible for now.』

The documents going around clearly weren't things I should have the authority to look at. The work they related to covered a lot of ground, and all of Zayin's info was going straight to me.

The reason such work was passed to me… a severe lack of personnel.

A knock came at the door. Some officials of the temple entered my room with yet another few piles of documents in hand.

When my face cramped as I looked at the papers, the officials…

"U-um… it's High Priest Gastone's orders. Recalling priests from the provinces looks like it'll take some more time."

I hung my head, and pointed for them to place their mountains in a corner of the room. After telling them to take away the forms that had been processed, I gave some work to Clara.

"Clara, I leave sorting the new documents to you."

She stood from her seat, looked at the new piles, and made the

exhausted expression I'd been expecting.

A complaint.

"If only these were books, I'd be able to go without feeling this fatigue."

Saying that, she went into allotting the documents. Now the reason there was so many matters that needed to be sorted out, lay in that the High Priests and Priests were all of the opposing faction.

I had thought of apprehending them, but the Fourth gave his take.

『Ah, these guys are all useless. It'll be trouble, even if you send them to the outskirts. Deport them all.』

It's all because he had said that.

And because of it, Gastone-san was going sleepless nights, and my party was resting on rotation. The fact that Monica could process documents faster than I had anticipated was a saving grace.

But they kept on coming and coming, and we weren't able to output them faster than the input rate.

Monica shook her golden twin tails into a mess.

"Why is it analogue!? If it were data, I'd be done by now! If it were digital, I'd be able to manage this country alone!"

I looked at Monica.

"Are you getting tired? You can take a break already. Rotate out with Miranda."

Miranda was taking a nap on the sofa, and I told Monica to switch out with her. There, Monica stood, and spread out both her arms.

"What's with your attitude!? Please care about me more! I worked really hard! I worked through the nights to make those costumes and armors, and I even modified Porter… yet you still treat me so lightly! Just because he's being called the Holy Knight of Love, the Chicken Dickwad has evolved to a tengu!"

I felt irritated, as I stood, and pointed at her.

“I’m not being called that because I like it! All I said was to rest if you were tired, so what is it you’re so displeased with!?”

Monica spoke.

“God dammit!! Just how am I supposed to get my magnificence through that damn chicken skull of yours!!? … Hah, I’ll prepare some tea. A light snack too.”

Maybe yelling calmed her down, as she left the room to prepare tea.

As she sorted through papers, Clara…

“I’d like a sandwich.”

As she indifferently went through the papers, Novem lifted her face as well.

“Same here. Because that will surely be easier to prepare.”

Irritated by Novem’s words, Monica turned her eyes to me.

“… So three peoples’ worth of sandwiches and drinks. No, I’ll prepare four.”

Miranda slowly rose from the sofa with her hair in a mess. She looked quite tired, and as she stretched, the chest area of her shirt was open, making her brassiere visible.

I immediately averted my eyes, and the Fourth…

『Lyle, your face is red. What’s getting worked up over something like this supposed to accomplish?』

When I thought him loud, the Fifth reported on his condition.

『… No, your face is just as red, you know? If mama were here she’d smack you.』

『Don’t tell him!』

I turned back to the papers before me. As I did that, Monica left the room mortified.

“Even when he doesn’t show a response when I give some light flashes… you damn chiiiiicken!!”

She pretended to cry as she left. But she properly closed the door behind her. What a conscientious lass.

The room quieted down, and Miranda left the room to wash her face. Without any words exchanged, we restarted our work.

❼

… Lorphys’ royal castle.

In it, Lonbolt had gathered the ministers to hold a meaning.

“A few days prior, Zayin formerly sent a messenger to request the formation of an alliance. That one’s fine. At the same time, they told us to proceed with that matter.”

It had been some days since May had delivered the letter.

An official messenger followed to apologize, and say that in the current state, Aura couldn’t leave her post. With things as they were, Lorphys hadn’t even requested an apology from her.

In the first place, Aura had little relation at all to the hostilities between Lorphys and Zayin. More so, from Lorphys’ side, she was more of an ally.

But the problem was the matter in question… that was the issue of teaming up to invade Selva.

A single minister spoke.

“If we cannot recover land from Zayin, then there’s a necessity for us to take some from Selva to recover our national power. What need is there to hesitate!? And I’m sure both sides have already agreed.”

The knight captain as well.

“We’ve already gathered masses of mercenaries in Lorphys. If we

agitate them any further, they may cause issues within the country. I support the invasion of Selva."

Prime Minister Lonbolt had conducted a deal with Gastone.

After retaking Zayin, they would invade Selva together, and the land gained would be given to Lorphys. In exchange for not returning the land Zayin'd taken from Lorphys, the matter was settled with them lending out troops.

But up to that point, Lonbolt hadn't thought they would win.

If he had to say, he did want to invade, and recover the country's national power. But while everyone had grasped the fact that Selva was moving behind the scenes…

"The royal princess has declined. War has already ended, she said. And she's no intentions to annul her marriage with Dario, it seems."

The leaders that employed their minds to the country. One of them slammed his fist onto the table.

"Just what is she thinking!? After those bastards have done so much, what meaning is there in offering them forgiveness! Prime Minister, are you sure you haven't failed in educating the girl!?"

The knight captain glared at the angry minister.

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that statement. But there will be no next time."

In his irritation, the minister lowered his fist again. Everyone shared the same sentiment. After a while passed without anyone opening their mouths, Lonbolt…

"They've won so much. And so clearly. If we end it all here, then casualties really will be kept to the absolute minimum."

Lyle's victory was so clear, that Lorphys was slow to respond.

Of all else, they had anticipate it would take a few months… or even a few years. They had never thought for him to accomplish it in such a short time.

After the country suffered some damage, Lonbolt had intended to turn the sentiment of the people… their dissatisfaction towards Selva. But the war had ended with only a skirmish or two.

A single minister.

“Cut the crap! I know she treasures the sentiment of the people. But she should know full well what sort of situation we’re in! What emotions we’ve been forced to endure… our knights became adventurers to earn for their families, threw down their swords, and some have even taken up garden hoes.”

More than twenty years prior…

Zayin had snatched land from Lorphys. That was back when Fort Noinyl was still the front most line.

But with the passage of time, and the princess being born after that had happened, it’s true that she had come to take it as natural.

Lonbolt breathed out a sigh.

“… It’s not that we’re hesitant to attack Selva. What we truly fear is Zayin. They’ll take the front lines in invading Selva, and what say do we have that they not snatch Lorphys away while they’re at it? The other party is a man who took Zayin with only a hundred to his ranks. If it’s now, wouldn’t he be able to take Lorphys in his hands?”

With those words, the gathered leaders closed their mouths.

When they saw him in the audience chamber, they hadn’t been that conscious of him. According to Alette, he was a skilled adventurer… from the way he stood, they thought he might be a fallen knight.

But when they tried investigating him, the name of the Walt House of the country of Bahnseim came out

They were only lords within that country’s lands, but their territory much exceeded what Lorphys held. Was he really the son of the Walts’; of Bahnseim’s strongest House?

That was what they wondered, but now such things were irrelevant.

As amazing as it was to defeat a large army with a small force, Lyle had taken a country with a hundred. That truth struck fear in Lonbolt.

There, the knight captain opened his mouth.

“But it’s true that we accepted the deal. If we one-sidedly annul our contract, he may use that as a reason to attack us. There are still mercenary brigades remaining in Zayin.”

No matter what they did, the leaders felt as if they were dancing atop the palm of Lyle’s hand. Honoring the promise was scary. Breaking it as well.

And without a decision being reached, the meeting welcomed its conclusion…

❼

“Lorphys isn’t moving.”

Letting myself fall over the desk, I felt like crying into the unfinished pile of documents.

Novem began to pat my back.

“I-it’s alright, Lyle-sama. I’m sure they’re just in a panic right now, and that they’ll begin their preparations soon enough.”

When I raised my face, I felt despair as I looked upon the mountains of papers before me.

“… I promised to help out here until the next war. If it isn’t coming, then will I be left on desk work for the rest of my life?”

There, Miranda stood, and unsteadily walked her way outside.

“Miranda?”

“I’m getting Aria and the rest of them. We’re short on manpower. If I just teach them a bit, then something like paperwork is…”

She wasn’t the usual composed Miranda. She looked like an avenger

trying to drag everyone down to the depths of hell alongside her.

I stopped her.

“Think back to the first day! We won’t hold up if we take out the time to teach Aria, is what we all decided, isn’t it? Even if one person ran themselves ragged trying to teach her, we concluded it would take some weeks, right?”

There, Miranda turned around, and burst into tears.

“But if there’s no change in the situation, we’re never going to get out of this work!”

She was cornered. We were all cornered to an extent greater than what we’d found on any battlefield.

Novem also looked at the mountain of papers.

“Monica-san has work elsewhere as well. She’s taking care of work we can’t do ourselves. Aura-san and Thelma-san are busy. And Gastone-san is doing the same, or even more than us.”

He called back priests of the same faction to put them to work. But they weren’t making it in time.

I turned my eyes to the document on the top.

It was Creit-san’s handwriting.

On it was a proposal for the unification of armaments issued to Holy Knight soldiers, and he had the design all drafted up.

The Fourth let out his voice. It was a dry, laughing voice.

『Ahahaha… rejected. And Lyle, how about increasing the training and work given to Creit-san and the rest? It looks like they still have time to work on trifling things like this.』

I resolved to increase Creit-san’s workload in my head, as I thought.

(Why isn’t Lorphys moving!? At this rate, we’ll never be able to escape from this hell!)

1 - Lorphys' Royal Princess

Lorphys' Royal Princess

The room in Zayin that was coming closer and closer to being my work prison.

In it, I felt like crying out.

Unending work.

And increasing work.

Why do we even need to do this? Work that couldn't help but make you thing that.

"Why won't they move? Even when we're ready on our side."

A just cause to invade Selva, as well as the necessary soldiers and supplies. We already had it all assembled. No, to be more precise, we were going to be recycling what Zayin had in store to use in the invasion of Lorphys.

The scale would be four thousand.

That was all the battle-ready troops we could prepare, and our logistic support was around the same numbers. At the same time, we were hiring mercenary brigades to finish preparing to invade.

The numbers were less than half of what Zayin planned to use on Lorphys. But that was plenty.

From Selva's diplomatic situation, they couldn't count on reinforcements. They had the larger countries of Galleria and Rusworth around them, but those two were glaring at one another, and there was no sign of them coming close to dispatching reinforcements. To be blunt, while Selva didn't have any major diplomatic enemies, they didn't have allies either.

They seemed largely uninterested.

The ones who had become masters at deskwork, me, Novem, Miranda and Clara looked towards May as she sat in the center of the room.

May was eating a meal Monica had prepared.

“I properly delivered the letter again, you know? But another meeting, he said. It sure is a long process.”

May laughed, but none of us felt like joining in.

I stood, and spoke to Novem.

“… I’m going to go confirm it with Gastone-san. I need to get Aura-san and Thelma-san to write up a few documents, so I won’t be back a few hours.”

Novem smiled at me.

“Very well. I’ll make sure to advance forward the work here.”

She saw me off with those words. Miranda and Clara were making doubtful expressions, and Monica acted as an interpreter for their sentiment.

“You’re running away I see, damn Chicken Dickhead.”

❼

A room in the temple.

It was a place more soothing than the rest of it.

Plants were planted around, and water flowed through the room’s extravagant construction. The white and round table was surrounded by four, but those four were making enervated faces as opposed to their surroundings.

A worn-out Thelma-san, verified something with a Gastone-san who looked like he’s collapse at any moment.

“Gastone, how is the present situation?”

I get the feeling Gastone-san was even more ragged than when I first saw him. His complexion was pale, his eyes bloodshot, and the hand lifting up his tea cup was quivering.

“No problems apart from the matter with Lorphys. No, there are problems, but they’re at a level where we’ll manage one way or another.”

A limp Aura-san put her right hand on the back of her chair, and bend her body as she ate some sweets. They were prepared by Monica.

“And why can’t you just recall them already? If you call back the priests scattered here and there in the outer regions, it will be resolved at once, won’t it? Ah, these aren’t bad.”

While she made a delighted expression as she munched on the confectionaries, Aura-san also looked quite exhausted.

Thelma-san spoke.

“Even if we call them back, we have too few to send in their place. Since we’re going to be changing the fundamental rule of the land, they’re quite some work to be done out there. You’ve officially become the Holy Maiden. In order to prevent foreign interference, were going to take heredity into account as well.”

Up to now, Zayin had been influenced by other nations, and manipulated into launching constant wars. Changing that would be a considerable amount of work.

A number of priests had collapsed; those losses totaled greater than the casualties of the preceding war. The ones who collapsed retrieved treatment, before promptly being put back to work.

This was hell.

Gastone-san looked at me.

“So you shall be going to Lorphys, Lyle-dono? I cannot prepare the paperwork at once, but how should I put it… why isn’t Lorphys moving? It’s a considerable expenditure for us to keep our troops at the ready here.”

Less than half the troops. But to move an army and maintain it required money and supplies. If Lorphys didn't move, we'd be the ones rendered immobile.

"I'm going there to ask. I want to put an end to it already."

Thelma-san looked at me.

"You have another plan?"

I took my cup in hand, and after a sip of tea, I closed my eyes, and shook my head.

From the Jewel, the Fifth let his voice.

『You resorted to tactics because you didn't have the numbers, but with the numbers together, a frontal assault is the best option. It's best to keep casualties low, but numbers are in themselves a plan and a power.』

Gathering troops was also a form of power. If you could do that, then you didn't have to actualize a risky plan every time.

"Nothing of the sort. It will be a normal war. And the reason I could win with strategy was because I had all of you with me. I wouldn't' have been able to do so much if I were working alone."

Aura-san stared at me with doubtful eyes.

"Oh I wonder. I heard it from the temple virgins, but in the city, our Holy Knight Captain is being treated like a hero. A hero who used a small force to defeat legions of men. How ironic it must be that we never once went up against a large army."

I laughed.

"If we fought a large army, then even if we achieved victory there, we'd have lost the war."

Thelma-san shook her head.

"But you first have to win for there to be a chance at victory. Still, in that case, why isn't Lorphys moving? Could they be doubtful of our forces? With our army having lost to a minority?"

That may be a possibility. I won too much, that Lorphys had come to believe the army of Zayin was weak.

That we wouldn't be reliable.

"Whatever the case, we need to get Lorphys on the move. I'll be back as soon as I can, so please press forward the preparations."

When I said that and stood, Gastone-san…

"Please return as fast as possible. Or we'll really have corpses on our hands."

… Gastone-san threatened me with an exhausted smile.

❼

After I rode May to Lorphys, I headed straight for the royal palace.

Before I could have an audience with the princess, I was to speak with Lonbolt-san first. Alette-san had been chosen to be my guide.

Walking through the palace, I struck up a conversation with Alette-san.

"So how is the situation in Lorphys?"

Alette-san looked a little tense.

"It's calmed down. A majority believe that war has been evaded."

It seems they were quite negative about war.

"In Zayin, we've made a formal announcement that Selva was the one scheming behind this matter. We're prepared to mobilize, and if possible, we'd like to make a move at once."

There, Alette-san turned to me.

"We want to mobilize as well. But the leaders' opinions are divided each meeting. And I have to ask you don't get them too riled up."

When I put myself on guard, Alette-san made a conflicted

expression.

“Princess Annerinne said to forgive Selva on this matter. Without nulling her engagement, she has expressed a desire for Zayin to step down.”

When I was too surprised to raise a voice. Some laughing voices came from the Jewel.

『What’s with that? Simply awful!』
『Now’s the time to attack. Totes not happening!』
『It’s a good thing we didn’t join Lorphys’ side. What should we do? Attack of our own accord?』
『Managing will be a pain. It will be easy enough to defeat them, but Gastone will die on us.』

While I felt so tired, the Ancestors sounded as if they were enjoying it.

I knew she’d fallen for the man, but I didn’t think it was to this extent.

I spoke to Alette-san.

“Um, we already made the official announcement that we were going to attack, you know?”

She nodded.

“Yeah, I know about that one. But the princess… we want to move as well. But we cannot do so without orders.”

The Seventh, delightedly.

『Hahaha, I’m getting the urge to crush Lorphys now. Should we just take it down while we’re at it?』

On that opinion, the Fourth.

『Rejected. As they are, Lyle’s party can’t manage it. And taking it will take time. We’ll have to get the princess to open her eyes. Kindness is supposed to be a virtue, but… it’s painful that she can’t recognize the present situation.』

The Third spoke in a lower voice than usual.

『A decoration should behave like a decoration. What's she trying to do by pulling it down… come to think of it, there were others in this country with claim to the throne, weren't there?』

The Fifth denied that opinion.

『They're a small country after all. It seems the current princess is actually relatively popular. There will be those that riot if she dies.』

Disappointed, the Third spoke.

『I see… but the individual herself is going to marry that Dario, so if you asked her to hand off her position, wouldn't she happily hand it over?』

He hadn't given up yet.

(What does he find so fun about this anyways?)

I shook my head, and walked down the palace corridor. I was a bit curious as to why Alette-san looked a little nervous as she watched me.

❼

The audience chamber.

In it, I found the figure of Dario glaring at me.

The princess, Annerinne, showed some tension as she looked towards me. In contrast, Dario seemed a bit frightened.

I had come as a messenger, so I planned to briefly relay my matter, and wait for a response. The knights were in the chamber as well, alongside Lonbolt-san and the other ministers.

Everyone was tense, but among them, Dario's fear was out of place.

For some reason, the Seventh burst out laughing.

『Dayum! Instead of hiding away the Selvian prince, they put him up front… they have no intentions of negotiation, do they not!? This is

bad, my stomach hurts!』

Something hit him in the funny bone. Dario truly did feel out of place.

(And wait, aren't the ancestors just a bit too high-strung lately? They aren't tired like me or anything… did something happen?)

After a bit of time, the princess opened her mouth.

"… Pertaining to the matter with Zayin, perhaps it's best I offer my congratulations."

Hearing that, the Third laughed.

『Oh my! She's already picking a fight, this girl! She can't even hide it? This girl's too honest with herself!』

The Fourth spoke levelheadedly.

『Is that not why she chose a man over her country?』

The Fifth, also levelheadedly.

『Why of course.』

And with that line, everyone in the jewel simultaneously burst into laughter. I really don't get where my ancestors' funny bones are.

While I listened to their laughing voices, the princess spoke to me with a serious face.

"But the war ends here. Isn't that enough? I have no wishes to enlarge this war any further. I'll have Zayin pull back their hand from Selva."

The ancestors laughed. Their stomachs ached.

The Seventh.

『No, it really was the right choice to join Zayin's side. With this one up top, it would be irritating all the way up.』

The Fourth.

『Well, even if it's interesting from the eyes of a third party, there are

cases where those involved can't laugh, I see.』

My feelings at the time.

(I can't feel the slightest bit of tension in the ancestors' laughing voices. This is no good. Even I'm going to end up laughing.)

Other people couldn't hear those voices, I'm sure. They were awaiting my response with earnest faces.

But with all the laughter entering my ears, I could only take the serious atmosphere as an extended joke.

"No, we've already made the formal announcement and declaration to invade, so withdrawing it will bring about various problems to our position. And in our negotiations with Lorphys, both parties agreed to attack together already."

The royal princess hung her head, and spoke a little regretfully.

"Then we shall be fine without the return of the land once stolen from Lorphys. Is that not enough to put your side at ease?"

Lonbolt-san burst out.

"Your highness, that's wrong!"

He began explaining the present state of affairs, but it was getting quite hard for me to hold in the laughter. Every single time, the ancestors would chip in their commentary.

The Seventh even…

『When they haven't done a thing, she'll have us return it? She's just going to ignore that we prevented Zayin from invading them? My, my, how convenient.』

The Third.

『She really is a convenient princess. No, a convenient woman, perhaps?』

There were some more laughs to follow. There, the Fifth.

『You guys would never be saying such things if your wives were here.』

The Fourth.

『Stop it. Don't bring it up now… you've made a strange sweat break out, you have.』

The ancestors… none of them could raise their heads to their wives, it seems.

They usually put up bravado, but when I thought of how frantic they surely must have been before their wives, it made me feel like laughing. No, I did end up laugh.

When shocked eyes enclosed me, I looked around. Their expressions were the height of seriousness.

I cleared my throat.

"No, My apologies. Um… well, let's use this opportunity to wash away all rudeness we've exchanged. So will Lorphys be able to send out troops? Or will they not? It couldn't be… that you'll say you'll be assisting Selva, I'm sure?"

When I frantically tried to smooth it over, I hurried without choosing my words, and ended up regretting my statement.

The Fifth spoke.

『What, so you do know how to rile people up, Lyle. Alone in an enemy camp… you don't get too many such opportunities. Ah, my gut.』

It really was a slip up caused by panic, and I really couldn't say anything to it.

The princess spoke.

"Trying to threaten us. Lorphys shall never side with one who can act so unjust! If you wish to converse with weapon in hand, we shall take you on!"

Everyone present tried to stop the princess. But hearing my

ancestors' laughs, even that began to look like a comedy.

I couldn't feel that this was a tense stage at all.

(It's no good, I can't hold it in anymore.)

The fatigue of unfamiliar work, and the immobile state of affairs wearing me out. I was psychologically worn out, so I made a mistake I never usually would…

My voice echoed through the chamber, my surroundings becoming chillingly quiet in contrast.

… I ended up laughing loudly. Perhaps determining that was a bad choice, the Fourth followed through for me.

『Lyle, no matter how interesting it may have been, you laughed too much. At least keep your expression constant, and make sure they can't read your intentions when you do it. Now then, that one was bad, so let's change our hand. No, in this case, it would be mouth…』

My past memories of the Fourth talking me into trying to seduce Thelma-san revived, but I was sure he wouldn't do anything like that here, and decided to believe in him.

Repeating his words.

"… You call us unjust, but Lorphys was once yet another country making use of Zayin, was it not? You think us ignorant? The Holy Maiden of three generations prior was a person of Lorphys. While I'm at it, there are records of them using the country to invade and pillage in Selva."

… When we were sorting through documents, I did see such information. The country had such a past, and whenever problems befell it, they did make proper records.

The border zone of Zayin, Selva, and Lorphys. The delineation was vague, so skirmishes were an everyday affair.

I never thought the paperwork job would prove useful here, but it didn't really make me happy.

“So you imply you’re all just? And in this matter with Selva. It was done to put Lorphys under their rule. To turn it around, they were trying to invade you, princess. You’ll just shut your mouth and permit it? From Zayin’s point of view, we cannot overlook such a country enlarging their national power.”

The one who had been silent up to now, Dario, stood, and yelled at me with an immensely threatening tone.

“Don’t get so stuck up just because you won for once! With Zayin’s feeble soldiers, you think you can overcome the might of Selva!?”

I smiled.

“Yes, that was my intention. That’s why I got our troops together to begin with. I thought I had already carried out the preparations for victory. But dear second prince, it does appear you know quite well of the battlefield. How about you go home and start preparing for war? I, Lyle, have a desire to learn a thing or two about the plains of war. And you must be oh-so strong. I simply can’t wait. I was just getting bored of how few worthy opponents were to be found in Zayin.”

『Ahaha, the surrounding expressions are wonderful.』

I began to sweat as I followed along.

(Damn glasses! After criticizing me, you riled them up even more! When I thought you’d get it all together, what the hell are you doing!?)

As Dario’s expression turned pale, I made the preparations to escape. Linked to me with Skill… Connection… I instructed May to get ready to run.

『May, the signs are looking grim. I beg of you… prepare for our escape!』

May spoke reluctantly.

『… You’re the one that stirred them up, aren’t you? Not that it matters. I’ll come to your rescue, so just stay put.』

On top of the sharp glares around, the knights were already reaching for their weapons. They hadn't taken stances yet, but they dropped their hips, and were prepared to move at any moment.

Dario tumbled onto the ground, and landed on his backside.

The Princes spoke.

"Dario-sama! … Apprehend that fool!"

She turned her right hand at me. As her long violet hair- long enough to reach the floor- swayed, and the knights were just about to leap, the window to the audience chamber shattered, and May jumped in.

In quilin form.

The surrounding ministers and knights backed off some upon seeing her form.

"A-a quilin, you say!?"
"A quilin came to save him? It couldn't be…"
"W-what should we do!?"

As everyone panicked, quilin-form May approached me. She swung her head to beckon me to her back, so I mounted her.

"S-stay put! Everyone lower your weapons!"

Lonbolt-san ordered the surrounding knights to stand down, and told me to wait. Dario had lost consciousness upon May's entrance, and wet his pants.

As the princess embraced Dario, it wet her hair. And noticing that, she thrust the man away.

"Kyah! I-impudence! My precious hair! S-someone bring something to wipe it with."

Seeing Dario collapsed on the floor, the Third spoke.

『I believe I've just witness the moment love shatters.』

And once more, the ancestors burst out laughing.

As a cold sweat flowed down me, I began to think of what to do with what's to come.

❼

A few hours later.

I rode May's back, and headed for the capital of Zayin.

I was given a letter from Lorphys, pertaining to the invasion of Selva. After that, they soon agreed to join the offensive.

Of course, on the promise that Lorphys and Zayin would have no hostilities between them.

The participants besides me would surely meet up later to discuss the specifics, but all I could do was hold onto the bag containing the documents, and let out a sigh.

"Just what was it… that audience…"

It was madness, or how should I put it, I had to wonder why I did something like that… It's certain that I was tired, and mentally unstable.

But normally, that would be no good.

And for some reason, the ancestors were depressed.

In order.

『Yeah, sorry. I couldn't stop laughing… quite a bit's been going on lately. I'll explain it tomorrow.』

『… Once it's come to an end, I have to wonder why I did something like that. I do regret it.』

『Looking at only the results, there wasn't a problem. It's that, you know. That… I was tired.』

『Looking back, that was rude and embarrassing. Let's just forget it ever happened.』

Was there something to tire out the ancestors?

I thought, as exhausted as I was, I returned to my room in Zayin, where I was sure my workload would have increased.

Emotionally, I felt from the bottom of my heart I didn't want to return.

(But maybe I can get Novem to console me…)

2 - Lyle's Room of Memories

Inside the Jewel.

On a break from work, I tried sending my consciousness into the Jewel, only to find a door had appeared behind my usual seat.

The doors behind the other ancestors led to spaces they called their rooms of memories. They were the rooms where those memories were preserved, but…

"Um, why are all of you making such tired faces?"

When I asked with a tilted head, the Third sat down on the round table to explain.

『The truth is, this door came out not too long ago. I tried taking a peek when it did, but…』

You went ahead and tried to peek into someone else's memories? Is what I wanted to say, but as his expression was a serious on, I decided to wait a bit longer.

There, the Third stroked his hair.

『… Even with the four of us looking in, we each saw a different scene. What's more, we saw things we couldn't think could be contained in your memories. I tried entering a number of times, but those memories were just plain bizzare. In my case, my brother… I saw a scene of Dewey alive. No, perhaps it's more accurate to say Dewey himself was there.』

He was making a tired expression, and it was quite a rare gap from his usual attitude. When we sent a glance at the Fourth, he removed his glasses, and wiped off their lenses with a cloth.

『In my case, my wife was lying in wait with quite a daunting pose. It was scary, so I didn't even try to enter.』

Hearing that, the Fifth shook his head.

『What's to be scared about? You're the only one who didn't venture in, you know? By the way, when I opened it, it was a child's room. Each time, it was a different kid's room, but every time, I would find my son or daughter there glaring at me.』

I heard of what the Fifth had seen, but I didn't have such memories.

In the first place, the time periods we lived were far removed.

The Seventh spoke.

『… Mine was worse. A memory even I didn't know of… no, a scene. But Lyle wasn't in it.』

Even when I wasn't present in it, he had seen a recorded scene. Everyone's expression held a number of questions, and I looked at the door to my room.

I stood before it, and slowly reached to open it.

From behind, came the Fourth's voice.

『It's best you resolve yourself. It doesn't show the nicest of things.』

As he said, I kept myself on guard and slowly opened it, to find the figure of Celes' back. And as I stood surprised, Celes turned, and directed a radiant smile at me.

『Die, damn trash.』

… She said that.

The next instant, I slammed it shut with all my might, and collapsed backwards onto my backside. The sudden happenings had thrown my breathing out of orders, and a strange sweat started coming out.

The Fifth approached me on the floor, and called out.

『What did you see?』

I forcefully got my breath together.

『C-Celes was there. She looked at me, smiled, and told me to die… but I don't have a memory like that. No, perhaps I've only just

forgotten it.』

I grasped the Seventh's extended hand, and stood. Standing in front of my door of memories, I was curious as to why I had seen Celes.

The Third spoke.

『… The other rooms only reproduce memories. We can change it up a bit, but as long as we aren't directly controlling it, it doesn't happen. I entered your room, and investigated this and that.』

The Third sat back on the table, and looked at the ceiling.

『It's as if they're alive, you know. If you say something, they'll respond. It was just as if I were talking to the real Dewey.』

Why did it come to this?

I couldn't understand it. The blue gem had become a Jewel, and the memories of the ancestors had revived.

But even those ancestors didn't have a full understanding when it came to Jewels.

The Fourth put his glasses back on.

『I've been wondering it for a while. Whether Jewels are really just there to turn Skills to memory, and let everything be passed down… there's that case with Celes as well. And Celes treated the blue Jewel as if it were a failure.』

The Seventh put his hand to his chin, and looked down.

『It's not only memories, but personalities that are transcribed… maybe the Skills aren't the main purpose, but the personalities themselves. I've tried thinking along those lines a few times to no avail.』

The Fifth sat in his own chair, and linked his hands behind his head.

『Why would you need something like that? Someone planning to try getting eternal life for themselves? Copying memories and personality forever, and taking over whoever gets their hands on it… in a sense, that would be eternity, but I can't really think there's a

point to it.』

It was scary to think of how such a dangerous tool was being sold on the streets a few hundred years ago. The First bough an unpopular gem, and it was inherited generation to generation. The Walt House's blue gem.

Unlike the Yellow Jewel in Celes' hands, it was a failure. Apparently.

I…

"So could the current Celes have been taken over by the vixen of three hundred years passed? Novem did say she was different, though."

Not taken over yet, is how it felt. Right, yet.

The Third got off the table, and stood to face me.

『Whatever the case, with so many personalities gathered, there hasn't been a trace of possession or anything. I can't think doing anything like that would be interesting at all. In all actuality, we're all aware we're recorded existences, and not the individuals themselves… eternal life is a fantasy.』

When I nodded, he gave a large clap of his hands.

『Now then, it seems the mysteries of the Jewel have increased, but who really cares. The problem is how you're going to defeat Celes. Let's go at this problem piece by piece, and concentrate on invading Selva for now.』

I folded my arms, and made a dubious expression. We were already prepared to attack at any moment. And now Lorphys was the same.

"It's about that, but we'll be off at once. It's just…"

The Fourth responded.

『Just?』

"Is it really alright that I don't do anything?"

❼

The next day.

The Holy Knights were lined up from the morning, and as the soldiers lined themselves up as well, Aura-san came out into the plaza before the temple.

To give a proper dispatch to the troops before the mission.

She was wearing that white dress that showed off her body's lines, and could it be she actually likes it? I thought, as I looked at Aura-san.

Both Thelma-san and Gastone were standing a little further behind.

"Brave soldiers of Zayin! In regards to the unjust acts of Selva, the time has come for us to lower the hammer!"

The civilians who's come to see the dispatch ceremony responded to her voice, and raised a cheer.

From the Jewel, came the Third's voice.

『A just cause is important, but if you know what's going on in the back, you can't really get heated at these things. Well, if they can't win, we can't move forward.』

We were going to crush Selva for our own objectives. Abruptly, I remembered the Divine Knight Captain… Armand's words.

(Go to hell, huh? I really am destined for hell, no doubt.)

But that wasn't enough to halt me in my tracks.

After gathering the eyes of all in the plaza, Aura spread out her arms wide.

"I appoint Holy Knight Captain Lyle Walt as the general of this army. The grace of the goddess shall surely bring victory onto you and your men."

In a place I would stand out, I got down on a knee, and accepted

the task of becoming general. Rather, there wasn't a suited person for the role at present.

"Yes! I will definitely answer to your expectations."

The applause of the people, and the yells of the soldiers shook the capital.

Aura-san smiled, and brought her right hand to the area around her chest.

"I expect great things from you, Holy Knight Lyle."

She really said it. As those around raised their cheers, I understood.

(This girl is cementing my moniker as Holy Knight. How cruel!)

To those who truly didn't know her personality, it surely looked as if she were placing her expectations with me, and gracing me with the name of Holy Knight.

But I understood. When I had a resistance to being called Holy Knight, I had once complained of it to her.

I stood, and directed my right hand towards her.

"The True Holy Maiden of the Reborn Zayin… Aura-sama, I will definitely answer to those expectations."

I said that. Her face twitched a bit, and I grinned. The words that did it for her were True Holy Maiden, it seems.

❼

The army of Zayin leaving the capital headed towards Selva's border.

Lorphys had stationed their men near their border in their own country.

The reason we carried out a plan to operate on two fronts was because it would cut the travel time from gathering at one point. At

first, I thought to get all the troops together before acting, but Lorphys' lack of movement had cost too much time.

Beside me, in her hastily-constructed red armor and with spear in her hand, Aria rode her horse infile. Novem, Miranda, Clara and Monica were resting in Porter.

Porter followed right behind me, and beside it, Eva rode a horse.

But her movements were stiff.

Aria called over to her.

"Hey, you look like you're going to fall at any moment. Get a grip on yourself."

Eva shook as she scowled at Aria.

"I've never ridden a horse in my life! There's no helping it."

Aria sighted.

"You knew it was coming. Instead of singing your songs on every break you got, you should've practiced riding."

Eva spoke.

"Even you, Aria. You were doing nothing but going around the food stalls! You think I didn't know how you played around with Shannon!?"

Looking at the feuding two, I spoke in a low voice.

"The two of you. Definitely don't let Novem, Miranda or Clara hear any of that. Definitely, I tell you! It really was hell on our side!"

There, the hatch of Porter's roof opened up, and Miranda suddenly popped her head out. She smiled, and followed it up with the top half of her body, before looked at us, and waving her hand.

Aria and Eva's faces twitched. Even as Miranda smiled, her eyes were ridiculously scary.

"You sure are kind, Lyle. If it were me, I'd be assigning them heavy

labor for a while. Shannon how about I make your only means of transportation by foot for around half a year? You're carrying your own luggage, of course. Aria and Eva… yeah, let's study some together next time. With Novem and Clara… I'm sure they'd be willing to help… You're not sleeping a wink until you're capable of doing it all."

Her face had turned expressionless by the sime she reached the end of it, and after that, Miranda disappeared into the insides of Porter.

I heard the sounds of Shannon thrashing about. The door at the rear opened up, and she was tossed out.

Her belongings on her back, she ran over to me.

"Just what did you guys tell her!? Lyle, let me on your horse!"

I remembered Miranda's anger, and shook my head.

"I'll take the luggage for you. Walk on your own. And you need to build up a bit more stamina."

Shannon complained to me.

"Even May was playing around! This is unfair!"

I pointed at the sky.

"Are you kidding? May is working on recon at the moment. Just give it up."

Aria directed her voice at me.

"H-hey, Miranda isn't serious, is she?"

Eva as well.

"T-to thinks besides song and dance, I'm a bit… if it were music, I'd do my best…"

Both of them gave strained smiles, so I gave an earnest one.

"Don't worry. I'll put in some break time."

Both Aria and Eva hung their heads on their horses.

❼

… Lorphys' army arrived at Selva's border.

Having received a formal declaration of war from Zayin and Lorphys, the country of Selva had recalled their second prince Dario, and it looked like they were going to put up a resistance to the bitter end.

Lorphys' army surrounded a border fort, and with the two war fronts Selva had been forced into, they fought on quite favorable ground.

They had some mercenary brigades gathered from the start, but two countries had declared war. They could only divide their fighting force, and there was little manpower in the fort.

Leading a unit, Alette brandished her sword atop her horse.

"Defensive formation!"

Shen she said that, the magicians deployed a Magic Shield spell to cover the unit. The large shield blocked the magic that had rained down from the fort.

Once the Magic Shield went out, it was time for their allies to fire their magic, and the fortress to block. But with their lesser numbers, they couldn't put up enough shielding.

Magic hit the fortress wall, and it crumbled a bit.

Alette spoke.

"Their defenses are tighter than I had anticipated."

To her side, her adjutant rode a horse.

"This is the foremost line at the moment. I believe it normal they prepare a fortress with magic countermeasures. But they haven't put much gold into it. The fortress will collapse in the first few days."

A back and forth of magic, and within that, siege weapons had been prepared to press down on the fort. The reason their opponent could only work to endure it was the difference in number.

Alette looked around.

“With the mercenary brigades on our side, the numerical advantage is close to four to one. It’s about time Zayin started their advance as well. I’d really like to break through this line before that.”

The reason Lorphys decided on invading Selva was due to the influence of Lyle’s actions in the audience chamber. His attitude as if he wasn’t even taking them into consideration. And the fact even a quilin would obey him.

They didn’t want make an enemy of the man who possessed the very symbol of good fortune. Or at least, the opinion of a minister who believed in that superstition had been taken into consideration.

But Alette was different.

It was something simpler than that. She didn’t want to fight Lyle.

Rather than fighting Lyle’s party, to which she couldn’t come close to seeing its depths, taking Selva on would be much more decent.

(I don’t think we’d lose if we fought, but what’s this sense of unease…)

A quilin abided him, and even in such an urgent situation, he had burst into laughter. What’s more, it was a truly pleasant laugh. Not one he had forced himself to make.

He was truly enjoying himself.

(That kind can be scary. They truly enjoy war.)

Lonbolt had also noticed that madness in the boy, as he frantically persuaded the royal princess Annerinne into her decision to invade Selva.

(Well, I don’t want to think she was swung around by a love that cooled down with something of that extent, but…)

Annerinne had permitted the invasion quickly enough that everyone present was forced to wonder just what had been causing all their troubles before. On top of that, she had given the order to

apprehend the royal family before Zayin got the chance.

(She really can do it when she's motivated…)

The force surrounding the fortress shot magic at it one at the next, cracking it more and more.

To Alette, it looked as if they were taking all their frustration out on the poor building…

3 - Fortress Battle

Fortress Battle

Having invaded Selva, I stood in formation before the fort as Zayin's supreme commander.

We surrounded its structure, and the unit we'd stationed began firing magic into it.

The ancestors watched that scene from the Jewel.

I wiped off my mouth with my thumb, and issued orders to Clara.

『Clara, magic is coming your way. Enter defensive formation.』

『Understood.』

After I confirmed that the magicians within the fortress planned to concentrate their fire on a single point, and burn it away, I gave orders to our forces on the opposite side of Clara.

Novem was stationed on that side.

『Novem, the enemy is focusing solely on Clara's station. Continue your attack. They've lost most their archers, so it's possible they may come out to attack.』

The attacks centered around our siege weapons shot down the enemy magicians. As long as we kept firing magic at one another, the attack and defense would continue until one side ran out of Mana.

ISeeing both sides exhausted and resting at the fall of night was a standard scene in war.

I had thought of using the knight to infiltrate the fortress. But the ancestors wouldn't let me do it.

The Fifth let his voice..

『… They're weak. It's true that things would keep getting worse for them if it went on at this rate, but that wasn't the time to concentrate on a point.』

He gave a harsh comment at the enemy command. But the Fourth was of a different opinion.

『Whichever way it went, they were going to lose, so it isn't a bad thing to look for the greatest plan. In truth, there weren't as much magic attacks coming from Clara's side, so perhaps they thought to crush them first?』

I gave an order to the soldiers near me.

"Send reinforcements. Do we have a messenger around?"

"Y-yes!"

A nervous knight received the orders, and went off to transmit them. I thought this was quite a roundabout way to go about it, but it was also one of the ancestors' requests.

The Seventh spoke.

『Hmm, I guess this is alright for a start.』

The Third.

『Just barely a passing grade, perhaps? Lyle's one thing, but both Zayin and Selva's movements are simply awful. More so, Selva's desperate, so you should try to learn a thing or two from the movements of their men.』

In a fortress surrounded on all sights, the soldiers and knights of Selva were putting up a good fight. But our momentum was on another level.

Within my head, with the Fifth's Dimension Skill, and the Sixth's Spec, I could understand the enemies' movements like the back of my hand.

With my Skill connection, I could swiftly issue out orders.

The stone face of the enemy fortress was slowly being chipped

away, and it seems they were panicking as they saw none of their attacks were reaching us.

When they concentrated their attacks on the squadron Clara was assigned to, Eva's corp rushed over, and put their Magic Shield up to block the attack.

On the other side, Novem's force had strengthened their formation.

The enemy was unable to block the magic of Novem's group, and as the fortress wall was shaved away without protection, I saw another enemy movement.

The Third spoke.

『Oh, so they're coming out. It's already the third day, so before their morale hits its low point, perhaps they're going to make a gamble.』

They were mounting their horses in the fort, and preparing to attack.

Alongside the difference in numbers, our side was able to conduct precise attack and defense, the enemy was no longer able to endure it, so they came at us themselves.

The Seventh didn't deny that decision.

『If reinforcements aren't coming, then that what it'll come to if they want the slightest possibility of victory. The state of their rations, and the falling morale… I'd even like to sympathize with this force's commander.』

But that doesn't mean we were going to halt our hand, so if the ancestors decided to move, they would thoroughly crush them, I'm sure.

I stood, and gave a message.

"The enemy is coming out. Tell everyone to brace themselves."

The soldiers ran forth, and Aria came to stand next to me. Rather than putting her out for an exchange of magics, I thought it best to preserve her strength.

Monica and Shannon were in the back, and May was also on

standby there. Miranda was on the side of the fort opposite to me, and awaiting my order.

There Creit-san came over to me on his horse.

“Lyle-kun! If the enemy is coming, than I shall take them on!”

Taking along his knights, he held up his spear, and showed his motivation. The soldiers held up pikes, as they waited for the enemy’s arrival, so if possible, I didn’t want anyone to go out and meet them.

I crossed my arms.

“Please wait for my orders before attacking. Aria, help out Creit-san’s force.”

When I said that, Aria seemed just a little bit unsatisfied.

“You won’t come along?”

The Fourth spoke.

『No, he’s earned enough achievements, so there’s no real point to sending Lyle out. And wait, it’s definitely no good for the general to go up front.』

The general is not to go up front, was a prerequisite. That was the basics of a winning general. But if you didn’t show your might, the soldiers wouldn’t be able to put their minds at ease.

In that respect, I’d already become much too famous in Zayin.

Without even going forth myself, the knights and soldiers were in awe of me.

“It’s because I trust you, that I’ll remain here. And the enemy is desperate, so don’t drop your guard.”

I lightly patted her back, and she took her helmet in her left hand, and ran off to where her horse was tethered.

I don’t think it was just my imagination that she looked a little happy.

Hearing that, the Third spoke.

『Trust, I see. Well, she really has grown, you know. That Aria-chan. It's her growing period, so how about having her aim for a General position?』

The Third said it as a joke, but I got the feeling she fit the role surprisingly well.

(I'll consider it.)

And the Fourth…

『… Lylem, you've dragged those girls this far. You better take responsibility.』

Watching her back as she straddled her horse, waiting at the ready for the enemy's arrival, I strongly gripped the Jewel.

❼

… Once the fortress gate lowered, and acted as a bridge, the knights came out on their horses to attack.

The soldiers followed behind, setting a course for the main camp where Lyle was stationed.

Aria gripped her horse's reins in her left hand, and cradled her right hand spear under her armpit.

Nearby, the Holy Knights, and the Divine Knights who'd gone through a slight occupational change looked quite nervous before the enemy's advance.

They were wearing helmets, but she could hear their rough breathing.

Within that, Creit stationed at the front looked at the battlefield from up on his horse, and spoke.

"It's amazing. How clearly I can make out our opponents' movements…"

Soldiers with pikes were waiting to intercept the incoming cavalry. When both sides collided, a number of knights fell from their horses, with spears in their bodies, and blood flowing out.

But many knights had brushed away the attacks, and broken through.

When the soldiers began their intense battle, Lyle gave the signal.

Creit raised a loud voice.

“Attaaaacck!”

And matching his words, the knights urged on their horse towards the enemy.

Aria kicked her horse’s stomach to urge it onwards as well, as she looked at the knight closing in.

(Wounded? But still!)

A broken spear was sticking out of a chink in his armor. But Aria took her mounted stance, and let out a thrust towards her enemy.

Her spear that was able to pierce straight through him, armor and all, was imbued with a hardening effect from a Skill. But as he spat up blood, he dropped his weapon, and grabbed onto Aria’s spear with both his hands.

“Bastard!”

Perhaps so as not to let her take back her weapon, he put in all his power, and tumbled himself off his horse.

Aria confirmed foot soldiers of Selva nearby, relinquished her spear, and pulled out a sword at her waist.

“I’m not too used to using this one.”

She jumped off her horse, and with her sword in one hand, she cut down the few foot soldiers coming straight at her. The glowing red gem hung at her chest allowed her the use of Skills.

And seeing it, the commanding officer leading the soldiers shouted

out.

“She’s a Skillholder! Surround her and take her down first!”

He ordered his subordinates, but Aria was smiling a bit under her helmet.

“Too slow!”

Her own Skill… with Quick, her movements became too fast for enemy eyes to follow, and after cutting at the commanding officer, she cut down the foot soldiers around him as well.

Her dime-a-dozen sword had become completely unusable from the chipping of the edge, and the blood covering it.

Perhaps she could still use it as a blunt weapon, but Aria hadn’t polished her blunt-weapon handling skills up too much.

She picked up a sword off the ground, pierced her own sword in in its place, and took in her surroundings. With eyes of fear, the soldiers of Selva were looking at her.

There, a single knight came out before her.

He had pierced a single knight of Zayin with his spear, before discarding it, pulling out his sword, and trying to lower it at Aria.

When Aria hit the bow aside, her opponent jumped down from his horse, landed, and set his aim on her.

In the weed-ridden ground, the foliage came up to his knees.

Yet he was moving around quite freely in his armor, as he locked blades with Aria.

(This one’s strong!)

Aria tried to retreat to make some distance, but the knight’s stance changed to hold his sword against his opposite hip.

(It’s coming!)

Aria suddenly leapt to the side, as a shockwave swallowed up the

surrounding grass. Aria was able to use a similar Skill, but the similar yet different Skill caused her interest to be piqued.

Under her helmed, perhaps Aria was having fun, as she laughed.

“Very nice. I’ve never really gotten the chance to go against a Skillholder.”

Aria tried to jump into his chest area, but he closed in the distance at the same time. Her Skill-reinforced sword let off sparks, and the blade chipped away.

But her opponent’s sword was perfectly intact.

“Amazing. How much do those go for?”

There knight of Selva spoke.

“Invader… be cut down by my blade!”

After clashing a few times with her picked up sword, Aria felt she was at a disadvantage against her opponent’s physical strength.

His sword was of splendid craftsmanship. It was even possible it was a Magic Tool. She made the judgement as she saw her own sword hardened by her Skill was getting torn up into an unusable state.

Aria tossed aside her sword, and drew the dagger she kept at the back of her hip. And retrieving a stick with her right hand, she swiftly fastened the dagger’s hilt to its end.

As her enemy closed the distance, Aria used her dagger-turned-short spear to block, before kicking him off.

The enemy knight… he surely had experience, but his swordplay was by the book. He had likely made it through up to now with his strength and Skill.

Through his visor, the knight glared at Aria.

“You know how to use your legs, woman!”

On her enemy’s words, Aria laughed.

“And you’re too well mannered!”

Saying that, she stepped in, and used a Skill. Quick.

As her movements changed, the enemy knight coughed her attack, and even countered. He had enough ability to keep up with her accelerated movements, so Aria made use of another Skill.

Body strengthening…

Weapon hardening…

And after taking a big step forward.

“Slash.”

The first time she saw the Skill was when Lyle had gone to subjugate bandits. The bandit leader had stolen her red gem, and had shown off the use of the Skill.

But the Slash Aria used wasn’t the same one the bandit let out. In sharpness, and destructive power, with Aria’s physical ability, and talent, it had all been dragged much higher.

The knight opened his eyes wide, as Aria’s short spear cut a deep gash into his plate armor.

By her feint, his own sword only cut fruitlessly through the air.

Blood poured out of his helmet, and when Aria withdrew her short spear, it flowed from his abdomen as well. Her body was splashed with the blood spurt.

The collapsing knight addressed her.

“T-tell me your name.”

And Aria replied.

“It’s Aria Lockwarde.”

While she couldn’t see the knight’s face, she felt he was smiling. And he looked around.

“… It is our loss. If you’re going to steal a weapon off the

battleground… you might as well use mine instead. And Aria…”

Around them, the ones who’d come out to attack were being slain, and many were surrendering themselves.

Aria kept wary of her surroundings, as she heard the knight’s final words.

“The next time we meet… will be in hell.”

She offered a short prayer to the deceased knight. And she accepted his sword. She took off his scabbard as well, and after inspecting it, she found it really was a Magic Tool.

“… I can only really use it as a well-made sword. I’ve heard that it’ll interfere with my gem’s Skills otherwise.”

With her spoils of war in hand, she heard the soldiers raise a cry of victory.

Looking at the fortress, she saw they had raised the white flag of surrender. And watching it wave, she gripped the sword, and thought.

(Hell, is it… but this scene is yet another hell.)

Around, the bodies of Selvian knights and soldiers. And though less than those from Selva, the corpses of Zayin’s knights and soldiers were littered around as well…

❼

… The news that came to Lorphys’ camp, was the truth that Zayin had breached through a border fortress within three days.

Alette received the notice as well, and when she heard the specifics of it, she was shocked.

It was night.

As the light of the lantern lit up her tent, Alette gripped the document in both hands. The small number of days wasn’t the problem.

In truth, Lorphys had done much the same to a fortress of Selva.

But what she couldn't believe on the report form was the numbers.

"They don't even have ten thousand? What's more, they brought it down with essentially four thousand troops… at the lowest estimate, the enemy should have numbered two to three thousand. So you're telling me they brought it down with those numbers?"

Normally, as long as supplies lasted, the defending side had the advantage in a fortress battle.

Quite a few conditions were necessary, but even so, with only a little more troops, it wasn't a situation that would work out so easily.

And in all actuality, Lorphys had pushed through with numbers.

Reading down the report, she saw the name of Creit, of whom she hadn't the chance to invite to her side.

He had taken the general's head, and performed the greatest service, or so it was written.

But Alette had noticed.

"… They purposely gave Creit all the achievements. I do admit if you use him like this, he'll shine quite nicely."

Creit's strong and weak points were known to her. She knew, them, but didn't try to invite him herself.

Creit was good at faithfully fulfilling whatever was asked, but only performed average when the situation called for him to make a decision himself. No, even lower than average, perhaps.

You needed to be quite a general to make good use of Creit, or so she appraised the man.

"He's not ordinary. As a knight, and as a general, he's first class… a genius of sorts."

Alette never thought Lyle to be a knight of such caliber, but there, the question surfaced.

“Then why did the Walt House drive him out? It didn’t seem that he had any particular problems, but… female relations? Did he lay hands on a woman he shouldn’t have? It’s possible. I have to warn the royal princess one of these days.”

Letting out a sign, she straightened out the clenched papers, and neatly folded them… there, it came to her.

“No, wait! He’s an upfront womanizer, and if he’ll even lay hands on people he shouldn’t… the royal princess… even Annerinne san… if it comes to that, then Lorphys will be…!”

With a flash of inspiration, Alette immediately went off to consult with her adjutant. She leapt out of the tent, and in the now-vacant space, the report she had abandoned leisurely drifted down to the floor…

4 - Selva Falls

The Capital of Selva

I stood in formation at a place where I could see the castle jutting above the walls, as I looked at the main force: Lorphys' army.

Their scale had swelled to twenty thousand, and it was mostly mercenary brigades. Some were those formerly hired by Zayin to invade Lorphys, but once they learned they wouldn't be paid, they had swiftly changed sides.

While musing over the importance of money, I looked over the city receiving the attacks.

We had kept our assistance at only drawing the enemy's attention for them. I mean, there was barely any profit for Zayin in this war.

The border zone where most of the problems and disputes occurred had been officially afforded to Zayin. But that was just about it.

No matter what we did here, it wouldn't really profit Zayin, so I couldn't work up their motivation.

(Because profit for me, and profit for Zayin are different things. I should minimize the exhaustion of the knights and soldiers that have been left to me.)

But I didn't want anyone to think we were being passive about it, so we were going to carry out the role of drawing Selva's manpower our way.

And as a result of that, a considerable force was pointed in our direction.

Looking at the movements within the capital, even the residents had been flushed out, and they were ready for battle, so Selva's resistance was quite a desperate one.

I unconsciously clenched the Jewel, when May stationed nearby

called over to me.

I hadn't had her conduct recon this time.

In the rear, Novem was to treat the injured. And Clara and Miranda were supporting a detached force.

Aria and Eva were assisting another force as well.

Shannon and Monica offered their aid to the rear supports from Porter.

"Hey, is it really fine if you're not giving direction?"

Her line of vision ended at Creit-san. And with the equipment of the Divine Knight Brigade that carried out the dirty work equipped on his body, Albano-san also sat in a chair at the base camp, putting his arm around the chair's backrest.

The two of them were glaring at one another.

Creit-san spoke.

"We have proclaimed we shall assist Lorphys! What are we doing, not aiding their attack more proactively!?"

Inside the base tent, Creit-san hit both his hands against a long table. Ant to him, Albano cleaned our an ear with his right hand's pinky, and made a fed-up face.

"That's why everyone calls you rockheaded. There's barely any gain in it for us. What's more, the other side will be troubled if we're too enthusiastic over it. Now just try getting first dibs with our forces. What sort of face do you think they'll make? When they have close to twice the amount of troops, they'll lose face if we one-up them here. We should just keep our distance, and hammer in magic."

Creit-san was too assertive.

And Albano-san too passive.

As the two clashed their opinions, the adjutant knight【Noy Verdell】listened to their takes on the matter.

“Um, then… isn’t Lyle-dono’s idea of assertively attacking, and drawing their attention good enough?”

When eyes fell on me, Creit-san nodded.

“I-is that really enough?”

Albano-san spoke.

“What exactly do you plan to accomplish by jumping into the fray? Lorphys is already moving to make this land their own. Their young knights want to use this opportunity to get some badges on their shoulders. Use your head a bit.”

Creit-san’s face turned bright red, and he grasped at Albano-san’s lapels.

“Albano, by who’s grace do you think it is you’re standing here…”

“Our high and mighty Holy Knight’s. Did you think I’d say it was because of you?”

Maybe the battlefield air was getting to them, as they began exchanging blows. I received a, ‘gonna do something about it?’ look from May, and stood from my seat.

From the Jewel, I could hear a strained voice from the Seventh.

『Good grief, they haven’t matured at all.』

The Fourth as well.

『It’ll be a bit rough leaving things to those to. You really should be careful with who you leave up top. They’re talented, but they can’t help but antagonize one another.』

Both parties had their strong points, but they had a number of weak points as well.

I…

“If you’re going to do it here, at least take it outside. Though having our commanders out of here will be out of the question.”

There, both of them sat in their chairs.

A messenger raced into the tent.

“Message! The force from Lorphys has breached the walls! They went on to open the gate, and have succeeded with their infiltration!”

It took a few days to get to this point, but that was surprisingly fast. It looks like the difference in numbers was a large factor.

There, Creit-san spoke.

“Let’s send a force ourselves! I will personally command the cavalry!”

Albano-san.

“And I’m telling you, you don’t have to move a muscle yourself. Get in their way, and you’ll be hated.”

Their opinions were divided, but I didn’t give my input.

I wasn’t going to stay in Zayin for long, so I wanted the two of them to build of some experience as the next candidates for the captain seat. These two too far out there.

There, Noy-san let out a sigh.

“Let us assist Lorphys some. Shut down their soldiers on the ramparts. Avoid attacking the city as much as possible. I’ll send a messenger to Lorphys to confirm it.”

Scratching his short black hair, Noy-san issued orders. It looks like he took in their proposals, added them together, and divided by two.

When he looked at me, I nodded.

I heard the Fifth’s voice.

『I see why Alette didn’t recruit either of them. They’re too extreme.』

The Third spoke.

『In that case, of the two, making one of them the knight captain is out of the question. They get into fights even when they’re of the

same rank.』

I looked at Noy-san as he received the report, and issued orders in the tent. From the formation of the Holy Knight Brigade, if I had to say, he wasn't one who stood out too much.

The type that usually leaned towards supporting people.

I sat, and put my hand to my chin. As I watched Noy-san a while, May looked into my face.

"What are you thinking?"

"Hm? Ah, nothing much."

(A former noble, fallen to adventurer, was it? Age-wise, in his mid-twenties… he's had his troubles, and more than that, if he was a former adventurer, he's sure to have gotten some education. His personality is one not to go to the front, but if he has these two…)

I had called him to headquarters for the role of knight captain's adjutant, or maybe vice-captain, but this personnel selection wasn't as bad as I thought.

(Ah, it may work out.)

When I gripped the Jewel, the Fifth understood what I wanted to say.

『… As a compromise, isn't it fine?』

The Third.

『If their individual traits are too strong, a trait-less knight captain can balance it out.』

The Fourth spoke.

『Not bad. Rather than that, if those two are there, something like this is…』

The Seventh thought him more suited than Creit-san or Albano-san.

『If he's had his troubles, won't it be fine? Looks earnest enough. His

main problem will be making those two work together, is how I see it.』

I nodded, stood, and approached a busy-looking Noy-san. He looked at me with a perplexed expression.

“Um, did I make a mistake somewhere?”

He was preparing himself to have his errors pointed out by me.

I put my left hand in his shoulder, and stuck up my right thumb.

“Congratulations. You’re the next knight captain!”

“… Eh?”

The surroundings went quiet, and it felt as if time in the tent had stopped until the next messenger came running in.

❼

… The knights of Lorphys who’d infiltrated the capital of Selva, arrived at the palace, and apprehended all its royalty.

Seeing all the blood spread out over the floor, Alette grimaced.

(… You’ve bought too much hatred unto yourself, Prince Dario.)

She had entered the palace to give a report to the knight captain within it. After verifying his whereabouts, she increased her pace to search out for the room.

In an unfamiliar palace, she asked directions from a number of patrolling soldiers, and when she arrived, she gave her captain the report.

“The Alette Corps have successfully subjugated the resisting Selvian forces on the western ramparts!”

In that minister-class office, the captain sat in a chair, read over the report, and nodded.

“Splendid work. Is that all you’ve come to report?”

The fighting was already dying down within the capital, and the flag of Lorphys was being hoisted all around.

As they entered their second day since infiltrating the city, they had send a knight to Lorphys' castle to report their victory.

Alette spoke to the tired-looking knight captain.

"No, there's more. It's a personal report, or more of a proposal."

They had just achieved victory, so the captain was in a bit of a good mood. He took his eyes off the papers, and met her face.

"Personal, I see. What sort of proposal?"

There, Alette-san…

"Yes! Between Princess Annerinne, and the Captain of Zayin's Holy Knight Brigade… let us have her engaged to Lyle Walt!"

After Alette said that, her captain knit his brow.

"Are you sure you're not too tired?"

And gave that response.

But Alette was serious. She was proposing it in all seriousness. Lyle had a problem with womanizing, but his achievements this time were greater than anyone's.

He properly headed the armies of Zayin, and had shown off the height of his commanding ability.

"I'm serious! He carries the blood of a Count House in the superpower of Bahnseim! What's more, speaking of the Walt House, they're world renowned, are they not!? There shouldn't be many problem with a marriage, considering his status. If we do it, Lorphys is sure to gain a strong and competent king!"

To Alette's long-winded explanations, the knight captain drew back a bit.

"No, before taking status into account, he was driven out, so what's the point… and I can't think that Zayin will let him go so easily, right?

Holy Knight, was it? There are rumors of him and Zayin's Holy Maiden."

An elf had passed through Lorphys, and sung their songs.

The rumors had already reached. Lyle's name had started to spread as the name of a gallant hero.

"If we have him drop by, and announce the engagement before they make an official announcement, there shouldn't be a problem!"

The knight captain spoke in a quiet voice.

"It's because you think like that, that you can never find a…"

"Did you say something?"

Alette pretended not to hear it, and drew closer and closer to him. She put both her hands on his desk, and brought her face even closer.

"Y-you're close! Too close! E-even if. Hypothetical, you see? Even if you manage to reel him in, from our princess' point of view, the Holy Knight is a hated enemy. There's no way she would… no, wait…"

The knight captain put his hand to his mouth in thought.

Alette looked over him.

"It's that princess we're talking about. It's possible she's forgotten her hatred alongside her feelings for Dario. And if we succeed, we'll be put on a higher position than Zayin. From what I've heard, his knight captain position is only temporary, wasn't it? Meaning while he still has some mind to leave Zayin…"

Alette knew that Lyle had only temporarily taken up the role of Zayin's knight captain. Her captain knew it as well.

Taking his hand off his mouth, the captain spoke.

"A marriage of nobles… it's an affair where the opinions of the individuals are second to nothing. But Annerinne-sama adored the stories of heroes."

Alette nodded.

“His face isn’t bad. And his blood line’s a famed one. Now that Dario is away, this is our chance!”

The knight captain leaned his weight onto the back of his hair.

“… I’ll at least propose the idea to Lonbolt-dono in the castle. I’ll send a fast horse. Your job is to bring it up with Lyle-dono.”

“Yes!”

Alette rushed out of the room, and hurried herself all the way to where Zayin’s forces were camped…

❼

After Selva was invaded, and I thought everything had ended, for some reason I was invited over to Lorphys’ royal palace.

Alette-san called me over, saying whe wanted to meet to further friendly relations for the future, and apologize about past events.

My job was pretty much over, and once I formally handed the role of knight captain to Noy-san in Zatin, it really would be the end.

Creit-san was opposed, while Albano-san accepted it. When I asked Creit-san whether he’d be able to handle all the paperwork required for the job, he made a conflicted expression, before reluctantly conceding.

Albano-san had slipped out of his adventurer life, and become a knight of Zayin. He couldn’t do paperwork from the start, and it seems he planned to pass all that sort of stuff to Noy-san in its entirety.

(No, I still have to return to Zayin, and do all the formal processes to hand over office.)

I saw all the gaudy ornaments had been stripped from the audience chamber.

The Fourth spoke.

『Oooh, so this is how it looked before. I quite like the nice and calm feel to it.』

The Fifth.

『It's because they prettied it up for the fiancé's tastes. More importantly, don't you find something curious about the eyes of the princess before us?』

Last time's audience was quite horrid, and I did feel apologetic about it. So I had brought my feet here with the intent to apologize as well.

That's why I came, but…

"Um, Lyle-sama, what are your hobbies?"

The Third spoke in amazement.

『This isn't an apology, is it? And wait, isn't her face a bit red? What? Lyle, did you do something again? Did you turn mr. lyle when I wasn't watching?』

I haven't had any Growths lately. If I had, I would have denied this audience with all my might. Because it would be more than clear it would bring a disadvantageous outcome to all parties concerned.

She stroked her violet hair restlessly, and before such a princess, I really didn't know what to say.

I felt an unfamiliar of some sort, and a strange sweat began to come out.

(No, you called my a fool not too long ago, right?)

"Hobbies, is it? U-um… what do you mean by that?"

There, she said something like, 'kyaah!' as she held both her hants to her face, and loosely bent her body back and forth. The hell's this. It's actually ridiculously scary.

Lonbolt-san standing beside her…

“Come to think of it, your comrades are all on the pretty side. As a single man, wouldn’t that be a lot of trouble? It is, I’m sure. Wo how about you decide the legal wife here? It must be hard to live an adventurer’s life forever.”

All of my comrades had been invited to the audience chamber as well. Lonbolt-san’s eyes were directed at them. But his eyes weren’t the eyes of someone gazing upon a beautiful lady.

(What is this guy talking about?)
As I thought that, the Seventh seemed to understand something, and he spoke to me.

『Lyle, this is a chance! It seems that royal princess has fallen for you! I’ve no idea the reasons, and I don’t even want to know, but if you keep this up, you can get Lorphys in your hands!』

The Third too.

『Oh, not bad. It was quite a big problem, and it isn’t a bad idea to secure a single country while you’re here. You’ll be able to make free use of Lorphys’ troops, after all.』

The Fifth.

『… I’m not really sure about that sort of thing. No, I do think it’s necessary, but how should I put this… that girl’s no good, isn’t she?』

The Fourth cut out he Fifth’s opinion.

『On this occasion, we can more or less ignore the minor problems. Lyle, say something to encourage her, and see how it goes. Listen here, this is for victory! It’s something necessary to win against Celes!! You must steel your heart, Lyle!』

When he told me it was to defeat Celes, I swallowed my fears, and addressed Lonbolt-san.

“Y-you have a point. Well, it really is hard to be the only man.”

There, Miranda spoke.

“Oh my, how awful. Even when I’m being so mindful of you myself.

More importantly, how about you just say it out already? Why did you call Lyle here?”

He sent a bit of a harsh stare to Miranda’s belligerent attitude. But Miranda didn’t falter.

Lonbolt-san spoke.

“… I was going to bring it up later.”

It seems the princess had gone off script. The original plan was to apologize to all of us here, and call me back alone later. Apparently.

“Lorphys had placed a high evaluation on your achievements in this matter, Lyle-dono. How about it? Want to try your hand at the throne, oh Holy Knight?”

Within the Jewel.

The Fourth gave a cheer.

『Okay, it’s here! Now Lorphys is in the bag! If you use this as a foothold, negotiate with Zayin, and gain full control of the entire region …』

But at that moment, Novem gave a bright smile, and opened her mouth.

“That is not possible.”

“Eh?”

I unintentionally ended up turning around. After the surrounding eyes gathered on her, a displeased royal princess shouted at her.

“Why is that!? Are you unsatisfied with me? The hero of hope… taking in his bloodline is yet another duty of royalty!”

Within the Jewel, the Fifth.

『No, there’s something wrong there. There’s something more important you should be looking at here.』

The Seventh as well.

『… Novem is opposed, you say? There's no way she doesn't understand what it means to get Lorphys in our hands here! Lyle, persuade Novem!』

Novem was smiling, but she soon erased it, and looked straight at her royal highness with a serious expression. There, the princess opened, and closed her mouth, unable to say anything in return.

"Lyle-sama and your highness' statuses are too far removed. And Lyle-sama has a large objective he wishes to achieve. I do not believe a marriage here will be of benefit to either side."

There, Lonbolt-san spoke.

"A large objective, you say?"

Novem nodded.

"And there are also the Walt House's precepts. The precepts its heads have adhered to for generations… I cannot say it here, but this union would be in violation of them. I cannot approve of this marriage."

I heard some cries of 'such impudence!' from the surrounding voices, but perhaps there were many who didn't want someone like me laying hands on the throne from the start, as there were some nodding nobles as well.

Lonbolt-san sensed the surrounding mood.

"… I see. Personally, I am interested with your goal. Lorphys has gotten quite indebt to you, Lyle-dono. If there is anything we may assist you in, we shall offer our support."

Sitting in her chair, the princess looked sad as she put her hands on her lap, and hung her head.

(I do feel sorry… but it's also true that I felt quite relieved.)

I decided to believe she would find a nice partner sometime down the line.

So we carried out the apologies initially planned, and shook hands

on the matter.

❼

The audience ended, and we were on the way back to Zayin.

I sat on Porter's roof, and asked Novem, who was on lookout duty beside me.

The sky was blue, and the sun was unhindered by the white clouds scattered around. While taking in those piercing rays of sunlight, I spoke to her.

"Hey, why did you refuse that proposal back there? If you hadn't we would have had the country of Lorphys in our hands."

There, Novem made a blank face. As if she was explaining the obvious.

"N-no, well… I mean, she didn't follow the Walt Family Precepts. And even if she may be a princess, her status wasn't a match with yours."

I held up the palm of my hand to her face, and motioned for her to stop, and wait a bit.

"Um, to summarize… you really just denied her on nothing but the precepts?"

Novem smiled.

"Yes. Because she wasn't someone worthy for you, Lyle-sama."

It was an extremely nice smile.

And with that smile, she told me the princess was unworthy.

In my head.

(Yet the First Generation who made those precepts randomly threw them out while drunk… even if I said it, I doubt she'd believe it.)

I slumped down, and spoke to Novem.

“The sun is getting stronger. Novem, you should go inside.”

“I’m fine. I’ve learned how to reduce the sunlight around me with magic. I must protect your skin as well.”

“S-sure.”

I had forgotten, but as always, Novem offered me excessive care. In the Jewel, the ancestors sounded their voices.

In order, Third and up.

『If Novem-chan says it, I guess there’s no helping it.』
『Thinking over it calmly, trying to look after that woman, and manage the territory would be hard.』
『These guys sure change their minds fast.』
『But what should we do? There’s quite a large, and urgent matter coming our way, is there not? We really do have to find a way to solve it.』

It was right before our eyes. A large issue that required immediate input.

It was…

(Hah, I ended up using all our money in this war, but what should we do from now on…)

… A problem of money.

5 - Lyle's Party

After passing through Lorphys, and returning to Zayin, it ended up that a party was to be held to commemorate our victory.

Celebrating a joint victory against Selva with Lorphys. Besides that, it was a party to celebrate the completion of the goals all that paperwork hell had been directed at.

In the temple's plaza, a large number of participants indulged in the buffet-style arrangements, as music streamed into the space.

But I was…

"Oh Holy Knight, is it really true you relinquished your captain position?"
"The new captain Noy-dono… will he truly be reliable?"
"Holy knight, which one are you really gunning for? Is it Aura-sama, or Thelma-sama? Personally, I'd like to support Thelma-sama here."

…I was meeting a barrage of question.

I smiled as I offered some harmless, and politically correct statements, looked at the people gathering around me, and sighed.

But I could put up with it.

From the Jewel, the Seventh offered some advice.

『Lyle, don't let your guard down. Your opponents may use this moment to see through your character. A lot of them are just asking useless things out of self-interest, but there are some useful ones among them.』

When I turned an eye around, I saw Miranda and Aria being called out to by some young men.

They seemed to be merchants. Other than that, the knights were striking up conversation with Clara, Shannon, and May.

Monica was quietly standing diagonally behind me, and it was as if

no one else could actually see her. If she could do something like that, I'd like her to use it more often.

But looking closely, no one tried to talk to Novem or Eva.

Eva was an elf, and as a demi-human, she received some discrimination. I had to push through saying she was my comrade, to even let her be invited through the door.

But the one that intrigued me was Novem.

(I was sure someone would call over to her.)

And as I thought that, I cut my conversations short, separated from the people around me, and walked over to Novem.

Putting the glass in my hand to my lips, I held its liquid in my mouth a bit to moisten my dry throat. From the continued conversation, I had grown tired of making a smile.

"Novem, Eva are you having any fun?"

When I sent such a voice, the two standing around the plaza's pillars looked at me. They were wearing dresses they'd picked out, and the impression the two of them gave off was quite different than usual.

Eva showed me the plate she was carrying.

"The food is good, but I'm not really sure? The stuff Monica makes had more variation."

It was a hurriedly thrown together party after reclaiming the country. There's no helping if they were lacking in preparation.

Monica spoke to Eva.

"I usually put in all my cooking skill to make it so that damn Chicken Dickwad's body grows as to not be able to live without me. But if you want to praise me, I'll happily accept."

Hiding her mouth with her right hand, Monica laughed.

Eva sighed, and placed her plate on top of a nearby table.

“You’re the same as always. Even so, I’m surprised you got so many people to come. Besides temple residents, it looks like knights, and merchants, perhaps? There are a few others, though.”

Novem carried a glass filled with some drink as she explained to Eva.

“They are envoys from other lands. Also officials of the Guild, and what looks like the adventurers who came along as their guards. They’ve been staring at you, Lyle-sama, for quite some time now.”

I did feel their fleeting glances, so I decided to head over. If they were Guild officials, then I should at least meet, and give my greetings.

And there were a large number of people aiming to strike up conversation with me here.

Even if I spoke among my comrades, it wouldn’t really lead to anything.

The Third spoke.

『I’ve only experienced this sort of party a few times, so I don’t really know, but is Lyle popular?』

The Seventh explained to him.

『He’s the centerpiece, I’m sure. I’m not even sure the Holy Maiden who reclaimed Zayin, or the former Holy Maiden or High Priest could amount to him at the moment.』

The Fifth sounded bored.

『Well, as long as you listen to nothing but his achievements, he’s a hero. In truth, the rumors that he retook Zayin with just a hundred must have spread by now… there are plenty of folks who’ll be curious.』

Foreign envoys, the knights, and the Guild. Then the merchants…

(Hah, I wonder if anyone will be willing to finance me.)

I thought that was a bit too much to ask for, but I wanted to deal

with our money problems promptly. I was able to sell my name quite well this time.

But at the same time, I empties my wallet. I have to do something, and earn some money.

(And earning it up steadily is… ah, come to think of it, once we return, we'll only be able to take up dispatch requests for a while, so the profits won't be too great.)

The completion fee.

We decided not to accept it this time. Because both Zayin and Lorphys were barely scraping by.

No, Lorphys may have been down on their luck, but Zayin had only gone through a bit of internal dissention. But right after that, it sent soldiers to assist Lorphys, and it didn't get any major profit from that.

Soliciting money from them like that made me feel quite reluctant.

And it would be troublesome if they went into economic strife.

(I really must do something.)

I thought, as I greeting the Guild officials with a smile.

❼

…Having come to Beim, Damien stood before the rumored haunted mansion.

He had searched out the mansion Lyle had purchased, taking along a conspicuous gathering as he came right up to the front door.

Behind him, three maids of the same exact appearance and outfit followed.

In contrast, it felt as if Alette's two subordinate knights were the ones out of place.
A gathering of rubberneckers had gathered at the peculiar sight.

While Damien and the maids stood out, what stood out more was the large golem standing behind.

No, rather than a golem, it was a modified Porter variant.

Able to be laden with large loads of cargo, the large Porter rolled along behind them. It was even bigger than the Porter Lyle had completed. Bit its main motorized portion was smaller.

The box it pulled behind was the majority of it.

It was furnished with a number of wheels, and the curious residents of Beim pointed at it, and spoke amongst themselves.

“My, my, there’s a perfect building for it over there. It looks like a storehouse. What say we take it for ourselves?”

The short Damien held a large metallic staff in his right hand, and he used his left to correct his slipping glasses, as he looked out at the large storehouse in the yard, and declared.

The maids.

“As expected of our master. That was a statement without the slightest thought given to the other party. But that’s exactly what makes him our master!”
“Well, we can negotiate with that piece of scrap metal who calls herself a Special Model, and snatch it later. If that doesn’t work, we need only beat the living daylights out of her with our coordinated plays.”
“My skills are thirsting for battle!”

To those three maids, Damien turned.

“Why fight? We’ll ‘borrow’ his storehouse, and if we say we’re using it to make the golem he requested, he’ll surely permit it, right? Don’t do unnecessary things.”

The maids hung their heads.

Alette’s subordinate knights were about to call out to console them, but…

“He scolded us. Meaning we are no longer trivial existences in our master’s eyes!”
“It’s yet another step forwards!”
“At this rate, we’re getting closer and closer to making it so his body can’t live without us.”

As Damien waited at the door, a group of two appeared.

They wore robes, and one of their builds could be made out as a warrior’s. He stood in front as if to protect the smaller girl, and the maids stood lined before Damien.

Taking off her hood, the girl showed her long wavy light-blue hair, as she greeted Damien’s party.

“Good day. And pardon my rudeness, but I am not wrong in assuming this is the mansion of Lyle Walt, am I?”

When the other party threw out Lyle’s name, Damien had the maids step down.

“Oh, Lyle’s guests? I’m also a guest… no, I’ll be living here, so perhaps a comrade in arms? Anyways, something like that. So what is your business? If it’s not urgent, then hand off the right of way. I myself *am* quite busy.”

Perhaps irritated by Damien’s attitude, the man standing beside the girl… besides Adele addressed Damien.

“Aren’t you being a bit rude? I don’t know who you might be, but we have also come on urgent business. We shant hand it off so easily.”

There, Damien looked over the man… Maksim from his head to his toes.

“You sure are prepared. Could it be you’re testing your skill? I heard it on the way, but Lyle sure has become famous. I believe it was… what was it again?”

As Damien turned to one of the maids, he had forgotten Lyle’s moniker. To the man who’d immediately forget whatever he wasn’t interested in, Maid No. 2…

“Holy Knight, master.”

“Right, that one! Since he got that title, did you come to test your skill on him? Or would it be… related to his little sister?”

When Damien said that, Maksim removed the cloth from the spear in his hands, and took a stance. When he uncovered his well-crafted armament, Adele had him step down.

The maids had lined up in front of Damien again, each with a different weapon in their hands.

“Maksim, stop it! That person isn’t related!”

“S-still…!”

The girl had a wary Maksim retire, before apologizing to Damien.

“I give my deepest apologies. For one of my… r-retainers to do something so rude.”

Maksim didn’t look satisfied, but Damien looked at Adele, put his hand to his chin, and nodded.

“Oh? You’re certain I’m not a follower of little sister?”

“… Her followers have a different atmosphere about them. And did you not purposely provoke us?”

On Adele’s words, Damien looked at Maksim.

“No, I really wondered whether you’d catch that. You did look quite tense. Even so, it’s the little sister again… Celes, was it?”

Damien had seen through their tension. And when he voiced Celes’ name, the two of them blatantly put up their guard.

So he sent a smile at them.

“My, what a coincidence. I also came to Lyle to solve my Celes problems. Though in my case, I came to run away from her.”

Adele calmed Maksim down.

“I’m sure. I’ve heard not a single soul can stand before her without

becoming her slave. A majority of them become quite fanatic about it. They wouldn't take on an attitude like yours."

At that point, the door of the mansion opened, and a blond-haired girl in maid garments came out.

Looking at the faces gathered outside, she showed blatant displeasure on her face.

"You've got some nerve to be fighting in front of someone's house. This is why you mass-produced machines are no good."

Behind her, Lyle came out in casual clothing.

Seeing Damien, he seemed quite surprised.

Damien raised his hand.

"Yo, Lyle. The truth is, I ran the hell away. That automaton over there gave a request, so could you lend your yard's warehouse to me? I've got nowhere else to live."

He sent a smile at Lyle.

And Adele and Maksim seemed quite tense as they looked at him.

As all eyes gathered on Lyle, he spoke.

"I just got back, so can't I have a single moment of peace… anyways, come in. I'll listen to what you have to say. And wait, what's that large object behind you?"

When Lyle sent his field of vision behind them, Damien…

"A large-scale Porter. It's quite useful for moving cargo. Of course, it took quite some money to make, and it's impossible for a normal human to move it. Now then, let's get right into unpacking it."

As Damien began moving moving to his own beat, Lyle opened his mouth.

"Yes, that's fine, but the talks come first. I'll lend you the storehouse, alright!?"

And said that…

❼

The day right after I returned to the mansion.

Damien dropped by my mansion.

I asked about it in the receptions room, and it seems Celes was planning to pay a visit to Arumsaas, so he had come to Beim in order to flee.

And I looked at the girl sitting beside him. A man of large build was standing behind, as if to protect her.

Monica was facing the three maid units, her eyes letting off a red light.

(I can ignore those ones.)

I thought, as I heard out the girl who named herself as Adele.

“So what business does one of Bahnseim’s Belgi House have with me?”

When I first heard her speak, I thought she was a follower of Celes, but it seems that was wrong.

And when I asked for the finer details, she looked straight at me as she spoke.

“Dalien, Arumsaas, Centralle, and Beim… I’ve heard many a rumor about you. Lyle Walt-dono, I would like to ask but one question to you, what sort of existence is Celes Walt.”

I put my hand to the Jewel out of reflex.

There, the Seventh let his voice.

『Hmm, a small seed sown in Dalien, is it? It’s come all the way here to bud?』

The Fifth as well.

『And it's budding in a nice direction. It doesn't look like she's deceiving us, but…』

I confirmed with the Skills, but Adelle and Maksim were in a yellow close to red. Meaning they were quite lost.

I met her gaze.

"I think of her as an enemy to defeat."

There, Adele's and Maksim's indicators solidified at yellow. The Sixth's Search Skill really was convenient.

And looking relieved, Adele put her business to words.

"Lyle-dono, won't you take in this Adele Belgi as one of your comrades?"

I looked between her and Maksim.

And they both nodded.

Maksim spoke.

"Protecting Lady Adele is my duty as a knight. If it is to serve milady, I shall follow your orders as well."

When I returned my eyes to Adele…

"… My home, the Belgi house turned strange after coming into contact with Celes Walt. They jumped up to join the civil war, and are repeating a pointless stream of battles. It felt as if they were watching a long dream. Before meeting her, my parents were supposed to be in opposition to it all."

I recalled the words the First had said.

(Monster… Celes, you are…)

Adele looked down, and shook her head, before raising her face again.

"I fled from my house because I judged it dangerous to meet with Celes. And while I was travelling, I caught rumor of you. Of the

actions in various lands, of the one driven from his home.”

I suddenly felt embarrassed.

(… So she’s heard quite a bit.)

There, the Fourth.

『Lyle, you don’t have to be embarrassed. The reason you did it was in hopes that a time like this would come.』

In my mind.

(… Even if you tell me that, Fourth…)

I couldn’t quite accept it.

Adelle continued on.

“A Gryphon slain in Centralle; you fought Celes there as well. And after that, to here… you’ve flowed all the way to Beim. It wasn’t to escape, was it?”

As she stared at me with serious eyes, I nodded. She had come all this way in search of me. I should deal with her seriously.

“I determined I couldn’t win as I was. That’s why I came here to build up power. If you wish to judge it for good or bad, I’m sure it’s for the worse. But I do intend to win.”

There, Adele stood, and gave an orderly bow.

“It wasn’t thoughtless. That much is enough to put me at ease. Use me, Adele Belgi, however you see fit. Though all I can really do is paperwork.”

And Maksim got on one knee before me.

“If Adele-sama is to serve you, then you are also my lord. My life is yours to use.”

From the Jewel, the Seventh let his voice. A loud voice at that.

『Paperwork? Paperwork!? Domestic affairs… Belgi! The Belgi House, is it!? I’ve got it. The Belgi House specialized in domestic

affairs! Lyle, you're dealing with famed feudal lords of Bahnseim! That's a house that's put out a number of prime ministers! … Though they didn't do anything too notable in my time.』

He sounded a little uneasy at the end, but I decided to take the two of them in.

"Understood. I will gladly accept your cooperation."

And Damien raised his face from his tea.

"… That sounds interesting. Then I'll join in too."

"Eh?"

When I voiced my surprise, he tilted his head.

"Why so surprised?"

"No, I mean…"

"If it's you, then I'm sure it'll work out some way or another, and if it doesn't, I'll just head for the hills again. And you don't plan on fighting Celes individually, correct? When I heard the rumors, I got this gut feeling you were going to do something big."

I thought he didn't say anything he didn't have interest in, and it seems he had put quite some thought into it. But the next words settled it.

"And if I ride the winning horse, I get the feeling you'll kindly provide me with a lab, and research grants."

I made a bitter smile.

Maksim cleared his throats, and asked me.

"Anyways. What exactly should we be doing?"

I averted my eyes a bit from everyone gathered…

"… Earning money."

And muttered that.

Adele made a dubious smile.

“Y-yes… realistically speaking, we will need money as well.”

She followed through for me. But Maksim looked fed-up, and Damien quite disappointed. It looks like he really planned to embezzle research funds out of me.

6 - Money

Besides its main building, the estate had a large storehouse on its premises.

In its basement was a connecting passageway, and an underground facility with some traces of something having been researched there. There was even something like an underground dungeon.

In such a place, Damien was frolicking about.

“Nice! Very nice! This simply feels like the perfect place to do some research! I can leave my large-scale Porter in the storehouse, and use this space to bring about the woman of my ideals!”

With skin glossier than usual, Damien’s eyes were glittering as he delighted and spun in the basement research facility.

The three maids, upon hearing that, immediately went into…

“… Oh my, there’s dust in a place like this.”

One traced the top of the furniture with her fingertip, and sent some fleeting glances at Monica. Hearing that, Monica shook up her twin tails, and refuted.

“We’ve only just returned! This place was a low priority, so I put off its cleaning to the end! If you guys want to live here, you should at least help out!”

Damien used a finger to push up his glasses and reset their position. It seems his spinning had caused them to misalign.

“You can use this place however you see fit as long as you don’t get in the way of my work. Now then, I do want to bring my equipment in, but with a facility like this, there’s likely a separate entrance for large cargo. It isn’t a bad idea to snoop around a bit. Ah, right.”

Saying that, Damien told maid No. 3 to, ‘bring it out.’ And from the gap between her skirt and her apron, No. 3 produced a cylindrical

object.

When she opened the lid, I heard a popping sound. After she took out its contents, and spread it out on the table, I saw it was something of a blueprint.

I looked into it.

“What are the the blueprints for?”

Damien looked at Monica, who was being stared down by No. 1 and 2.

“It’s that girl’s request. In exchange for handing over extra option slots, she gave me a request for a golem. What’s more a type that uses an automaton’s core. Those cores are the only thing I can’t seem to replicate, but if it’s just making a golem out of it, we should be able to produce a golem with a sort of sentience.”

I turned to Monica

“So this is what you were talking about before?”

She raised up her twin tails, and touched her left hand to her hip, spreading her legs a bit apart to settle into a pose.

“You can praise me if you want. No, praise me, dammit. I prepared all this for you, Chicken Dickwad.”

But Damien…

“It’ll still need quite a bit of experimentation. I’ll have to prepare a prototype as well. The theory is solid, I’m able to make that prototype, but… I don’t have any materials to work with, do I.”

It seems he was lacking in funds, so he couldn’t make it.

I looked at the humanoid golem of the blueprints. Its form was that of a woman in armor. The design was quite different than the golems Damien made use of.

“You took quite some inspiration from the female form… how much would one of these cost?”

There, Damien looked up at the ceiling, and muttered to himself, before…

“With the equipment in order, two thousand gold. With that, I can make a prototype, repeat some experiments… for the first one to be perfected, it’ll take around three thousand, perhaps? But after that, I should be able to mass produce them for five hundred gold per.”

I ended up doing a spit take.

“We don’t have that sort of money. And wait, considering the amount of cores we have…”

Damien spoke with a smile.

“It’s best you resolve yourself to spend several tens of thousands of gold. Well, there are other problems as well.”

“Other problems?”

When I asked, Damien…

“Processing the metal is a problem, but more than that, it’ll need to make use of a large quantity of Rare Metal. After making one right by the blueprints, I’ll have to verify it works without problem, and modify… we’ll also need merchants capable of working Rare Metal, and making requests to such people will also cost money. At the very least, it’ll run for the aforementioned sum.”

Regardless, it would cost money. Meaning I should think of the sum he presented was an absolute minimum. The chances it would cost more than that were quite high.

Damien was still smiling.

“But isn’t it fine? There are plenty of skilled craftsmen here, apparently. If I had to say the most pressing problem, it would be money, and securing those capable personnel.”

I spoke.

“And that’s the hard part.”

Even now, I felt I would crumble at the knees.

(Several hundreds of thousands of gold… something of that scale is impossible for me alone.)

❼

Raising money.

If you were to think of an adventurer's means of earning money, taking requests from the guild was the best way.

When I brought my feet to the guild for the first time in a while, I found the adventurers' and receptionists' eyes gather on me as I came through the door.

As I was walking through the city, I felt such stares as well.

But within this building, it was even greater.

I walked up into a receptions line, when a receptionist called out to me.

It was Tanya-san.

"Lyle-kun, a moment of your time please."

"Eh?"

She got me out of the line by pulling me by the arm, ascended the stairs, and led me all the way up to the third floor. The second floor was usually used for meetings, but I had never even stepped into the floor above it before.

Having been brought to such a place, I looked at the adventurer leaving the room.

Messy and curling long black hair, and a tall stature. The woman looked at me, and grinned.

"Oh, so you were called here too, boy. I thought you had more prospects than Creit and Albano, but that sure was fast."

Tanya addressed the woman… Marina-san.

“So you’re taking a subjugation quest this time as well?”

There, Marina-san…

“I’ve no interest in anything else. I want an opponent that puts up more of a fight, but… boy, from what I’ve heard, you’re quite strong, right? That small girl flashing her navel was more my type, but I’m starting to get interested.”

Saying that, Marina took a step closer to me. I immediately bent the upper half of my body back, and reached for my weapon.

I didn’t pull it because Tanya-san had entered into the space between us. Pure, untainted thirst for blood… feeling that, I broke into a cold sweat.

Tanya-san spoke.

“You’re playing around too much. Personal quarrels within the guild are forbidden.”

Marina-san put her hand to her lips, and smiled.

“Don’t make such a scary face. But fighting you isn’t bad either… now then, I’ll be going off to complete my request. See you later, boy.”

She took her leave, and I sent a glance to the back of her black coat.

In the Jewel. The Fifth evaluated her as follows.

『You find them here and there. Those beast-like folks. Call them battle maniacs if you will, but anyways, they’re strong, and out of the norm.』

The Seventh didn’t like dealing with them.

『Strong by nature. Different than those around you. Not anything like martial arts, the type that has feral strength. I wasn’t too good with them.』

The Fourth, interestedly.

『… That girl's the same as the First. Simply strong, that sort of thing? No reason to it, but anyways, a strong person. From the eyes of one who's spent their life polishing their strength, they're a troublesome type.』

The Third spoke a bit thoughtfully.

『I'd have wanted something like that. Well, that kind's irrelevant to money or loyalty, to they're hard to deal with. Anyways, Lyle.』

Hearing that, I turned back to Tanya-san

She had walked ahead, and was beckoning to me in front of a certain room.

"Lyle-kun, this way."

As I headed for the room, she went inside. I followed behind to find quite a calm space.

A table was placed in its center, and the chairs were extravagant. Even drinks were prepared.

"What room is this?"

When I looked around the room and said that, Tanya-san…

"A room that deals with a portion of adventurers. Adventurers with stories they wouldn't want others to hear, and adventurers with competence are directed to this desk. Of the ones you're acquainted with at the East Branch… Besides Marina-san, there's also Alette-san."

According to her words, a portion of adventurers…

Adventurers whose abilities were recognized could take care of their receptions here. Not only in simple strength, unless one cleared some conditions set by the guild, they wouldn't be able to come here.

"… So I've been recognized by the Guild, you say?"

"Rather than that, they had no choice but to recognize you. That sort of thing. Zayin and Lorphys, and Selva. It seems a number of

monikers for you are circling around. The one we've heard most of… Holy Knight, was it? A named adventurer… a number of people come here to raise their names. To avoid any unnecessary trouble, the need has arisen for us to prepare private rooms to deal with them."

From the Jewel, the Third sounded satisfied with that explanation.

『I see. At the first floor's desk, there's a chance someone will eavesdrop. It's a countermeasure for that.』

Making a bit of a worn-out expression, Tanya-san spoke to me.

"But a majority of adventurers will never set foot in here. Even if they're competent, most parties will still take on requests on the first floor."

That one made the Fourth satisfied.

『Meaning it's a measure to keep watch of the ones that stand out. People that require special attention. Isn't that nice, Lyle?』

(It's not nice at all!)

Tanya-san sat across from me, and took out some documents. She had a number of requests prepared.

Looking at them, their monetary sums were different from what I'd seen up to now.

"I get the feeling these are different from the ones I often see on the first floor,."

I turned my eyes from the documents back to Tanya-san. She smiled, and tilted her head a bit.

"Because we'd like competent adventurers to fulfill request befitting their competence. The monetary rewards are only set to match that."

Meaning they were of high difficulty, and most adventurers would be hard pressed to finish them. Those sorts of requests gathered here. Looking through their contents, there were even some for Gryphon

subjugation, and Dragon subjugation.

What's more, it wasn't just around Beim.

"You can dispatch further than the countries around Beim?"

"That's how it is. The guilds servicing the area often find themselves unable to cope when unexpected monsters come out. They seek assistance from other guilds. But It's not as if there are always enough skilled adventurers on hand. Beim had its fair share of those adventurers, so they send those requests to us."

I put my hand to my chin, and looked over the forms. All of them offered between several tens of gold, to several hundreds.

"Even if we complete these ones, Labyrinth Subjugation requests…"

"Will still circulate to you preferentially. But it's less dangerous than passing through a difficult Labyrinth, so more adventurers prefer accomplishing these."

If it was several hundred gold, it's true that choosing this route provided more of a stable income. Without knowing what sort of Labyrinth it was, and what enemies you could find in an unknown Labyrinth.

Rather than challenging something like that, the enemies you'd fight were clearer, making it safer to prepare for.

But the heads of history showed disapproval.

The Fourth.

『That one, with the travel distance, and the time it takes, it's efficiency is terrible. Dragon slaying in the far north? The travel will take two weeks by boat one way? It'll be a month before you return. Even if they give you eight hundred gold for it…』

The Third held the same opinion.

『And considering the equipment you'll need, the profits are less than half that, aren't they? It doesn't really matter, but doing nothing but these to earn money is a bit… it's not nearly enough.』

Dragon slaying. The opponent was a dragon, a subspecies, at least.

A nostalgic opponent. I mean, the flightless【Land Dragon】with its large forelimbs was an enemy I'd fought in the First's room of memories.

If it was a dragon capable of flight, the reward would probably go up in the thousands range.

Tanya-san looked at me.

"Land Dragon subjugation, I see. Interested? It's taken a stay in the forests, and it is an individual that has repelled the knight brigades sent after it. If you beat it, you'll be able to raise your name."

Looking at the papers…

"It does interest me. It's a monster I've fought once before."

There, Tanya-san made a curious expression.

"Would that be before you became an adventurer? Land Dragons are a subspecies of dragon, and by no means an easy enemy to take down… they've brought countless adventurers and knights who came under that impression to an early grave."

I looked over the document, and smile.

"Our ancestor took one down alone. Well, it's a nostalgic foe, so I was only curious. I am right in need of money."

When I complained, Tanya-san spoke to me.

"Money, is it… it's possible you could solve that problem at once. Of course, only if you complete that request, that is."

I was curious, so I looked at Tanya-san.

"What do you mean?"

She…

"It seems you've forgotten. What this city has been named. While this is the city of adventurers, it is also the city of merchants, Lyle-

kun.”

Hearing that, the Fourth…

『Hmhmm… you say they’ll support an adventurer? There are times the feudal lords of Bahnseim will hire them, but the merchants should be hiring bodyguards or specialists. According to this receptionist, it sounds as if they’ll provide a considerable sum.』

There, the Fifth spoke, as if just recalling.

『We’re next to the sea, and if there are plenty of merchants with ships, there should be a considerable amount of merchants who can set up large enterprises. If there’s no feudal lord, they’re deciding the tax amongst themselves. Well, it’s a different place from Bahnseim.』

The Seventh spoke delightedly.

『Now then, I’m sure they’ve piled some up. For the sake of continental peace, how about we put a bit of their funds to good use?』

The Third got everyone’s opinions together.

『Yes, let’s go get a prior investment. I had completely forgotten we were in foreign lands. Right… if we haven’t got any money, we need only take it from someone who does!』

I thought.

(What’s this feeling? I get the feeling these people are even darker than usual.)

Tanya-san looked at my troubled face in wonder.

“What’s wrong, Lyle-kun?”

“Eh, um… Tanya-san, could you go into that in a bit more detail?”

… Shannon looked at the blueprints in Monica had brought out.

To be more specific, she was looking at the paper that gave off a bit of a strange reaction. The ink had been injected with just a bit of Mana, so Shannon could see its lines as well.

And what those lines showed were ambiguous to her.

Looking at the sheet over the table. Besides Shannon, Clara and May were there as well.

It was a strange grouping, but the others had gone out shopping, and they wouldn't be back for a while.

Monica ignored the three of them, and went into cleaning the room.

Clara gripped her glasses steady as she looked at the prints.

"Why is it woman-shaped? If they wanted to make it look strong, then armored golems like the ones Professor Damien uses would be best."

May spoke uninterestedly.

"Humans are always doing incomprehensible things. Isn't this just one of them? Or maybe it's Damien's or Lyle's fetish?"

Munching on the sweets in her hand, May looked at the blueprints. She dropping crumbs around, and Monica approached to clean the area around her.

"Please don't spill. And don't dirty the blueprints… well, I've copied them out, so I guess there isn't a problem."

Hearing about copying, Clara twitched in response. But she returned her eyes to the prints.

Shannon spoke to Monica.

"Hey, why is it shaped like a woman?"

There, Monica spoke as if it were natural.

"It will use the cores of my sisters. Of course it will take on a

woman's form. The equipment is needlessly extravagant, but it's supposed to look like a dress. There's no helping if it costs some money."

Clara spoke levelly.

"Eh? Wouldn't it be fine if you cut down those costs?"

There…

"Women cost money. That much can be left to the Chicken Dickwad's hard work. Well, to explain a bit more, the dress-type armor has a purpose of its own. Explaining the mechanics behind it is a pain… yep, as I thought, a woman has to dress her best! Let's just leave it at that."

Shannon put her thoughts to mouth.

"How strange. And how many sisters do you have, anyways?"

"'Many', is the only way I can answer that. If you want to speak in production numbers… probably a few hundred thousand? If you want to narrow down to my production line, then a few thousand? These are all the cores I have on hand, though."

Monica held up a cube on the palm of her hand. That small cube was made of a number of smaller ones stacked together.

Shannon spoke.

(It's somewhat strange. And scary.)

Shannon wasn't able to understand it, but shaking her head, she turned back to the glowing lines on the blueprints…

7 - The Trēs Trading Company

… She saw the ocean.

Slowly sinking down into the deep and dark depths of the waters, she saw the lights grow further and further away.

Glittering small and red lights drifted through the sea in masses, but there were no signs of any lifeforms around.

And after she reached the bottom, the small light began to gather into her.

They leisurely took their time, and once those lights began to fade out as well, she found herself resurfacing.

A voice called out to her.

『Your role has ended, …』

A shadow against the light of the sun called out in a feminine voice. She got the feeling the figure had called out a name, but she couldn't catch it.

And she found herself saying something.

『Next time…』

There, the shadow extended a hand. The arm she extended herself to take it, was horribly sullied. Beaten up, and having come up from the sea, her arm was covered in variants of water plants, and shells; even coral had stuck to her.

Her heart started beating faster. She looked into the water's face to find the image of a monster reflected back.

And her conversation partner smiled.

『Good work, …』

After her forgotten name was called out again, her arm crumbled,

her body fell apart, and she sunk to the ocean's depths once more. Breaking up into small pieces, her unsightly form joined the ocean's floor…

❼

… When she opened her eyes, it was still dark outside.

Outside the window, she saw some lights here and there across the town.

The girl with her breathing in a mess moved her head, and extended a hand to the pocket watch on her bedside table. When she took the golden clock in hand, she opened its lid to check the time.

Once open, the lid emitted its own light, letting her read the face.

She raised the upper half of her body, and got her chaotic breath in order before brushing away the hair stuck to her face from her sweat.

"Hah, hah… it's four. Going to sleep now won't end too well."

Touching her left hand to her forehead,【Vera Trēs】looked over the room. It wasn't the room on the boat she was used to, but her own room in her mansion.

It was clean, but it was furnished as if no one was actually living in it.

After rising, she pinched her sleeping wear. She had sweat quite severely.

"It's happening a lot lately. I used to get them once a year, or never."

That nightmare was one Vera had seen a number of times. Every time, she would wake up in shock.

(I wonder when the first was.)

Shaking her head to the side, she stripped off her pyjamas, and headed to her room's bathroom in her undergarments to take a shower.

Her black hair was grown out in the area she tied into angel wings, and that part reached up to her lower back. But the rest of it was barely long enough to touch her shoulders. Her well-shaped body held splendid curves.

Even with a body like that, the girl had her own things to complain about. Among them, her greatest complaint was her reserved chest that set her apart from her younger sister.

(Hah, if they were a bit bigger, would people look at me too…)

She looked into the bathroom mirror to find her own violet eyes looking back. She traced her pale skin with a finger.

Even after spending a majority of her year on the high seas, her skin showed no signs of tanning. Other people had told her she was different from others a number of times.

But she wasn't treated any worse.

More than that, the sailors even called her a goddess of fortune. Because no matter how much danger struck, as long as she was on board,- strange as it was- the boat would never sink.

On the oceans inhabited by dangerous monsters, they wouldn't attack when she was there. The individual herself thought it as nothing but a coincidence, but others didn't see it as such.

And at this point, she had received a precious boat from her father, and was working for the sake of her family… Vera Trēs was a prominent merchant girl, even in Beim…

"I'll have to go shopping today. We're setting sail next week… it seems we have some valuable cargo this time around, and they told us to take it across no matter what."

Muttering that, she took off her undergarments, and got into the shower…

“Vera Trēs?”

Having dropped by Rauno-san’s office with Miranda, I accepted the report, and read the name aloud.

I had gotten some fame, and a name like Holy Knight to myself, but in exchange, I went through a drastic drop in capital.

Even so, I had received my money’s worth, and my treatment from the Guild had changed. But it still was troublesome not to have any money. It would put quite a restriction on are actions henceforth.

Of course, we weren’t troubled with living expenses, but as I was in a position where I needed a national-level budget, I had no choice but to seek out support.

And I had requested the investigation on that matter to Rauno-san.

Miranda silently scanned through other documents.

Rauno-san scratched his head with a sleepy expression as he explained it to me.

“The ones who can answer to your hopes are probably the Trēs House. They don’t currently have any adventurers they’re backing, but as merchants of Beim… well, they’re one of the merchants controlling this city. They mainly profit off of trade.”

A large trading enterprise that owned a number of large-scale transport ships, and quite famous in Beim.

If there was anything strange about them, perhaps it was that they hadn’t exclusively contracted any adventurers, while being merchants of the city of Beim, perhaps?

At that scale, it wouldn’t be strange if they were backing a number of promising parties. Yet the Trēs House wasn’t doing anything like that.

Rauno-san explained.

“They’re working quite extensively, but that isn’t the only problem. When you send out a ship, you see. With storms and accidents, and

monster attacks, it isn't rare for it to sink. But the Trēs House had a high success rate. If you compare it to others, it's a considerable gap. So they have that credibility to them, and a wide relation with other mercantile houses. That's why they're one of the prominent merchants of Beim. To such an extent there isn't a fool who'll lay hands on them."

I looked at the documents.

I was trying to find a merchant who would sponsor us, but while the Trēs House was on the top of the list, they were the party with which we would have the lowest chances of success. Or so was written on the report.

"You don't think they feel like backing me?"

Rauno-san smiled as he rested his arms on top of his sofa.

"Harsh as it may sound, at your level or reputation, even if you make a market for yourselves, I don't know if they'll even take you seriously. To the Trēs Trading Company, countries like Zayin and Lorphys are small fries in the realm of trading partners. Even if you offer them a monopoly an those nations, I can't say for sure they'll make a move."

From the Jewel, the Fourth sounded conflicted.

『Doing something like that would be troubling. Monopolies have their share of merits, but they have plenty of demerits as well… even to, I underestimated Beim. As expected, we can't let our guards down around merchants.』

The Seventh was considering the other reports as well, but…

『The best choice is still the Trēs House. The others will want Lyle's fame, so they'll be relatively easy to nab, but this one won't get much merit from taking Lyle under their wing. No, there's even a chance they'll clash with other merchants.』

Zayin and Lorphys were dealing with non-Trēs merchants.

Pushing those houses aside, and even conflicting with those that set

Zayin and Lorphys as their main bases of operation… I highly doubt the Trēs House would be interested.

And at present, they were conducting large transactions between other countries. They were a mercantile house that didn't need my fame or connections.

"… The money and terms of the other places are all much the same. One thousand gold a year is it? Work requests are a separate sum."

Rauno-san laughed.

"If they're going to contract a famous party, there are surely merchants who would put out double. But if it's an adventurer party they're going to be using regularly, they'll settle for a lesser sum, I'm sure. And it's all as long as they get you to themselves, is the condition. What's more, this is an estimate, you hear. Play it poorly, and you'll be on even worse terms."

With my reputations, it seems this was around the limit.

(As Tanya-san said, rather than rather than my merits as a mercenary, they may be evaluating based on my stand-alone prowess.)

If they're going to use them as bodyguards, even if they weren't too smart, strong people were best.

Warriors over tacticians.

That's why Tanya-san told me to call out to the merchants after slaying a dragon or two.

Finished reading through the papers, Miranda turned her field of vision to me.

"Anyways, if we want to have a chance, it'll be with that Vera girl, you say? Lyle, think you can get her to fall?"

As she asked that quite naturally, I pointed both my palms at her, and shook my head.

"I have no idea what you're talking about. Fall? Would a cliff be

involve? Even like this, I still have quite a resistance when it comes to hitting or cutting at girls, you know."

Rauno-san looked at Miranda.

"If you want a chance, it'll be with the girl, is what I'm saying. It's unbelievably low. Of all else, I haven't heard any talks of her being a flippant one. And at present, the time she spends aloft is longer than her time on land. I asked the sailors, but apparently, she's a goddess of fortune, and not a target of romantic affection."

Hearing about goddesses of fortune, I tilted my head.

"Goddess of Fortune?"

Rauno said, 'it's just a rumor, you know,' asnd said it was an unreliable tidbit of info.

"No matter how difficult the voyage, if Vera is aboard, it will succeed… it isn't just the sailors that believe that. The people of the Trēs house do too. That's why Vera's a goddess of fortune."

I looked at the documents, as I put my hand to my chin, and pondered over it.

(If we want money, this is the best place… with other merchant houses, they'll have relations with other adventurers or mercenaries. That's not bad, but I don't like how it feels they're going to restrict our movements.)

As I thought, Miranda looked at my face, as she giggled to herself.

"Come to think of it, you'll need a sea route to go north, right? How about hopping aboard one of the Trēs House's state of the art ships? It'll shorten the way there and back."

Rauno-san as well.

"Come to think of it, it's just come in to the port. A large scale model with quite some speed to it. I heard it was Vera's personal one, but there's no doubt about it."

The state of the art ship the Trēs house didn't want to sink at all

costs, was naturally given to Vera-san.

“Well, putting seducing the lass aside, you’ll at least have a chance to talk and see if you can get some support.”

There, the Fourth let out an interested voice.

『Come to think of it, I’ve never tested the effectiveness of my Skill on a ship. It does work on smaller boats, mind you.』

The Third.

『Ah, that sounds nice. If he can raise the speed of ships, then Lyle’s got something to offer to the Trēs House.』

The one to oppose those two opinions was the Fifth.

『He may crash something, and there’ll be disputes, so you’d best stop it there. Though there shouldn’t be any problems if it’s just to test it out. Still, Trēs and a goddess… a coincidence? Sure doesn’t feel like it.』

I thought over the Fifth’s words, as I got all the papers together, and handed them to Miranda. She used a finger to trace Vera’s name on the front binding.

“How interesting. Last time Novem denied Princess Annerinne, but I wonder how it’ll turn out this time around.”

Hearing that, Rauno-san covered his mouth.

“That rumor was true? What’s more, Damien of Arumsaas has holed himself up in your mansion… what are you doing this time?”

I stood, and addressed him.

“I’ll leave the payment with Innis. And I’m not doing anything too big this time around. I’m just going off to complete a request.”

I said that with a smile, but it doesn’t look like he believed it.

“I do think dragon slaying is important. But here we have a guy who ran from knighthood… well, if it’s nothing, then so be it. And just hand the reward to me. With Innis, it immediately disappears into

rent and living expenses, and I only get chicken feed over here."

Miranda laughed at his words.

"Don't want to. I want to stay on good terms with Innis. And you should at least pay rent and living costs."

Rauno gave an unmotivated response of, 'It's a pain. And it works out one way or another, even if we default,' as he lay down on the sofa.

I thought.

(When he's so unsteady in life, why is his work so thorough?)

I became a bit interested in the man known as Rauno.

❼

… Novem brought her feet to the Trēs Trading Company.

She carried a letter of introduction from the guild, and dropped by with Clara to ask if they'd let the party board their ship.

They were let into a back room of the firm, and the man in charge came out to give them his greetings. The man in his thirties wore a stylish suit, and had a soft demeanor.

He sat on a sofa, opposite with a low coffee table between them. Clara put the offered drink to her mouth, and it didn't seem she would participate in the conversation.

Novem told the man their business.

"We have heard there is a boat bound north. That it's movement speed is a cut across the rest. Would it be possible for you to take us on board?"

There, the man in charge replied.

"I have read over the Guild's letter of introduction. I never thought the Holy Knight of rumor's party would make such a request of us.

But it isn't a passenger ship. It has the necessary facilities, but we can't just have you hitch a ride and leave, can we? I do think it would be safest if you rode a ship provided by the Guild."

The region the Land Dragon subjugation had come up in would take much too long to reach on land. They would need to cross a mountain range, and while it wasn't impossible, a land route wasn't much of an option.

And a guild ship would also take too long. That was on top of the dangers of it sinking.

(… To be honest, it would be possible for us to get there by ourselves.)

Novem spoke with a smile.

"We are not requesting a free ride. Our objective is to shorten our travel period. We will be able to pay money to compensate."

There, the man pretended to think hard on it…

"Unfortunately, even if you offer money, I think it'll be difficult. It's our state-of-the-art large-scale vessel after all. Some parts of its craft have been kept to absolute secrecy. If you insist so heavily, could you board a different ship? It'll be one of our own ships, and with the guild's high recommendation, we won't mind you riding free of charge."

From the smiling man, they could feel a considerably strong intent to refuse. At that moment, a knocking sound rung through the room.

The man made a troubled expression and apologized, before standing, and heading for the door.

"What is it? When we're dealing with guests…"

The man's voice outside was barely audible.

"… No, wasn't this matter my jurisdiction…"

It seems they were arguing outside the room.

Clara emptied her tea, and looked at the door.

“It sounds difficult. As expected, they don’t want us to approach their goddess of fortune? Well, there are those sorts of rumors about Lyle-san.”

After hearing the rumors about Lyle, no parent in their right mind would ever let their precious daughter aboard the same vessel. That’s why Novem and Clara were the ones who had come to negotiate.

It had ended in failure. That’s what Novem thought, but…

“… No, there’s something strange.”

She could hear some flustered voices on the other side of the door.

“… At a time like this? B-but still, we could find adventurers to take up guard duty anywhere… understood. I’ll try asking. Tell the boss that as well.”

The door opened, and the man entered. He looked a little more impatient than before, but his smile hadn’t crumbled.

And the man…

“I apologize for before. And our circumstances have changed. If you will accept a request of ours, we shall accept the previous matter. Of course, we will also pay a considerable reward for it.”

Seeing the man’s change in attitude, Novem smiled.

“Could you go into the details?”

And said that…

8 - The Vera Trēs

The Vera Trēs

At the port to the north of Beim, a large number of ships were anchored.

For every ship with a sail, there was one with smoke coming out its chimney. I felt the sea breeze as I went to the place I'd been ordered to. A place with a conspicuously large vessel.

The slaves loading on the cargo shed their sweat as they conversed over where they'd go drinking today.

There were lots of people around, and I felt if I turned away for only a moment, I would end up losing Shannon.

I looked behind, and found that Monica was holding Shannon's hand.

So I looked forward with some peace of mind, and we walked towards the biggest ship at the port.

(I've left Adele-san and Damien at the mansion, but… even so, it sure is a large vessel.)

Looking up at it up close, the size of the ship surprised me.

In the Jewel, the Third was excited.

『Amazing They've even gotten around to make something like this? It really makes you feel the difference in era.』

The Fourth was also excited.

『Just how much funds and talent went into making it more… if it's made a profit despite all that, I'm starting to get the urge to buy one.』

The Fifth stopped the Fourth with an appalled voice.

『Stop right there. If it sinks, it's all for naught.』

The Seventh didn't know that such a boat existed, so he honestly admired it.

『Hmm, if you load cannons onto it, you'd be able to take down towns near the coast. You could sink other ships to your hearts' content, could you not?』

Hearing that, the Third sighed.

『Just because you like using guns, could you not load cannons onto everything? Guns and cannons are the weapons of the rich, and they're more a hobby than anything else.』

Right, firearms were considerable expensive weapons. They could substitute for magic in some instances, but every single shot required bullets and gunpowder.

They could display a certain level of performance, but as it was possible to block them, they weren't too wide-spread as a weapon. It seems they had their fanciers, and even now, they're being heavily modified and altered.

The Seventh bragged about his own weapon.

『You just don't get it. It's no longer the age of sword or bow. From now on, how you succeed in using guns will decide the outcome of war.』

The Fifth ignored that opinion.

『Way too costly, so rejected. Training the wielders alone will take too much time and money. And from there, the guns, and gunpowder, and bullets… substituting for them with bows and magic would be quicker, easier, and more efficient.』

While there were many wooden ships around, the Trēs House's ship was of metal. It had a smokestack, letting off fumes into the sky.

As I gazed at such a ship, I heard some voices.

"How are the preparations?"
"Lady Vera's belongings have yet to be loaded. After that, we need only wait for the last-minute cargo, and the guards."

“Guards?”

When I turned, I saw a woman on the gangway holding up a parasol. She wore a red dress above, but it became a miniskirt below.

Black thigh-high socks, and brown boots. Her hair was black, and it was tied into angel wings. But while the sides were long, the rest of her hair was cut around her shoulders.

And the girl with a brown leather travelling bag had a golden pocket watch at her hip and… from her back, I could see the grip of a gun peeking out.

When our eyes met, she looked over me sharply. After her violet eyes took me in, she put down her bag, and pointed her finger at me.

“Wouldn’t that be those adventurers over there? And wait, why are you letting them on? I never heard anything about this.”

The sailor… the captain at that, apologized to the young woman.

“I apologize milady. But it seems a large monster has been sighted in the sea route we’re taking this time… even for you, would be too dangerous, so the boss made the arrangements.”

Letting out a sigh, the girl picked up her bag, ascended the gangway, and boarded the boat. Looking our way…

“Then come aboard already. Even if you’re guards, if you haven’t boarded when the time comes, you’ll be left behind.”

After giving some bitter smiles, we headed for the boat.

The man in captain-like clothing looked over us with serious expressions. I produced the Trēs House’s letter of introduction from my handbag, and handed it over.

“… All clear. Well then, please board. But it’s no passenger ship, so it won’t be much of a graceful voyage. Once you enter the ship, the crew will guide you.”

I nodded, and led my party members up the ramp.

Novem looked around as she spoke.

“So they’ve gotten able to make something like this.”

She seemed impression Meanwhile, Miranda…

“Bahnseim doesn’t have much a connection to ships. In the lakes and rivers, you can find small ships or boats, but that’s about it. Shannon, watch your step.”

Just as Miranda warned her, Shannon tripped on the steps.

“… Why can’t they make the gangway any easier to climb?”

The captain laughed as Shannon lectured the step with teary eyes.

“Even like this, it’ one of the finest gangways. Better than those planks you see over there, right?”

There, I saw the planks leading up to the wooden ship nearby. Truly, it was better than a line of wooden planks.

“Going over the sea and stuff… you humans are definitely strange.”

As Eva climbed with a pale expression, May pushed her from behind.

“Hurry it up already!”

And behind them, Clara was already wobbling on her feet.

“F-fall and… I die.”

She was saying that to herself, and at the end of the line, Monica and Aria were shaking their heads.

“You won’t die. It’s fine, the Chicken Dickwad will save you, and perform CPR while he’s at it. He’d never let such a chance slip by. Right, damn Chicken?”

“Monica, just what do you take me for… whatever. We’re going ahead.”

Aria grabbed Clara’s arm, and walked beside her.

“Good grief, then isn’t it fine as long as you don’t fall?”

Seeing us, the captain took off the cap on his head.

“Will we really be alright? With this party?”

He seemed anxious as he looked at us.

❼

On top of the boat.

From the deck, I was watching the other ships leave port, when a voice called over to us.

“You’ll be in the way over there. Come inside.”

The one who called out was the black-haired red-dressed girl from before. Her age was around my own, if not a bit older.

“No, I heard someone would come to guide us.”

There, the girl let out a sigh. She folded up her red parasol.

“Follow me. Everyone’s busy, so I’ll guide you in my free time.”

Hearing that, we exchanged some looks before following behind the girl… Vera Trēs.

As we took our luggage in hand to move, Vera-san spoke.

“Hey, by the way, is that really all you’re taking? You’ve deposited the rest somewhere, right?”

“No, this is all. Ah, but we properly have other things along as well, so don’t worry about that.”

Upon hearing my reply, she thought for a bit, before nodding, and leading us inside the ship.

When they saw her, the sailors we passed by smiled, before opening the way. As I mused over how well-liked she was, we arrived at our first destination.

“This is the guest room. We’ve prepared three rooms, so use them how you see fit.”

The narrow room we were led to had two bunk beds. Three of them were prepared for us, and the doors had the memo, ‘For Guard Use’ hung on them.

Novem spoke.

“Then should we leave our luggage here for starters?”

When she said that, Vera-san…

“It’s fine if you leave your belongings, but you should manage your valuables yourselves. They’re locked, but you’re on a ship, so there are some things you’d best be cautious about. And the sailors are mostly ruffians, so don’t go carelessly picking any fights.”

Hearing that, Aria scratched her head.

“We’re bodyguards, you know?”

There, Vera-san laughed.

“You think you can properly fight atop a boat? What’s more, this is pretty much the home turf of those seamen. I recommend you avoid fighting them. Look, when you’ve left your luggage, I’ll lock up.”

We left our valuables, left our rooms, and followed Vera-san.

A dining hall we assumed we would eat at, bathrooms, and a bath… the bath was more of a space prepared for one, and if you wanted to take a bath, you’d have to prepare it yourself.

Clara could prepare hot water with magic, so I thought of leaving it to her if we ever wanted one.

After showing us to all of those, she led us around the general area. Where the lifeboats were kept, and where we weren’t allowed to enter.

In the end, she showed us to a large room in the rear of which I wasn’t sure if it was alright to call her personal room.

It was vast, and extravagant.

Ornaments, and lovely dolls, cloths and book shelves. Countless ornaments.

The room with a red carpet laid out beneath had a rug of what seemed to be monster fur. With white and black stripes, that fur came from a large cat-like monster.

Clara spoke.

“Isn’t that a White Tiger? A large one at that.”

There, Vera-san sat on a sofa, stuck an elbow into the armrest, and rested her face on her hand.

“That’s right. Sit wherever you want. Every time they give me all sorts of gifts, and it would be a waste not to use them, so I hang them here. The large stuffed animal is the first one I receive many years ago.”

The large stuffed bear had a large bell hung around its neck.

A question rose in my head, so I asked.

“Why did you let us into to this room?”

There, Vera-san looked at us with a serious expression, as she sat up straight, and brought her right hand to her mouth…

“Oh, I wonder. But I simply felt like doing so. Ah, besides the crew, perhaps you’re the first man to be allowed in my room.”

After Vera-san laughed, her eyes turned towards Novem.

“Hey, what’s your name?”

Novem smiled.

“It’s Novem. Novem Forxuz.”

Vera-san looked delighted.

“I see. I’m sure you already know, but I’m Vera Trēs. Perhaps I should call myself one of the cargo you’re charged with protecting? I

really don't need it, though."

It seems, we weren't needed here.

(Goddess of Fortune, is it.)

The boat she boarded wouldn't sink in any storm. Because she had such a jinx on her, the sailors called her a goddess of fortune.

When I was about to name myself, Vera-san held up her hand, and told me to stop.

"I already know about you. I just remembered, but blue hair and eyes… you're Holy Knight Lyle, aren't you? I never thought such a talked of adventurer would be boarding this vessel."

Seeing her laugh to herself, I…

"I do quite hate that moniker. Pleasure to meet you, I'm Lyle Walt."

When I gave a courteous bow, Vera-san nodded, stood, and greeted me.

"You probably knew, and I said it once, but I'm Vera Trēs. I'm sure my father pressed your party to come along, right? The Guild has already send a ship to deal with the monster, it seems."

Shrugging her shoulders, she sat on the sofa again.

There, the Fourth's voice came from the Jewel.

『Lyle, here you should at least say, 'No, I'm here because I wanted to ride *your* ship'.』

I ignored his opinion, and asked what had piqued my curiosity.

"Come to think of it, this ship must have a name, right? What is the ship called?"

Vera-san frowned a little as her eyes glared at me.

"I'd like to think you didn't know before you asked. This ship's name is… the Vera Trēs. Father named it. Even when it's a cutting-edge vessel, what was he thinking?"

Seeing her rub her temple with her right hand, I gave a dubious smile.

And Monica opened her mouth.

“I heard it was state-of-the-art, but just how amazing is it?”

Vera-san looked at us, and smile.

“That’s a secret. Is what I’d like to say, but I’ll tell you what I’m sure you can find out yourselves. The important parts have been processed from Rare Metal. It wasn’t possible for the craftsman or shipwrights, so we had to call in a famous dwarf blacksmith to make the parts. At the very least, there’s no doubt it goes passed what other merchants would invest in their ships. On top of not having a sail, you didn’t see any water wheels either, right? This one uses something like a screw inside the water.”

Hearing that, Monica nodded a number of times.

“I care not about screws, but the blacksmith interests me. Could you introduce him to us?”

Vera-san made a dubious expression.

“Wait, screws are considerably amazing, you know? Well, I’m sure the blacksmith will be impossible. He’s not an acquaintance of mine, but one of father’s. I heard my grandfather helped him in his younger days, so they probably got acquainted around that time.”

And after we chatted a bit, Clara thought up a question, and asked.

“Why did you let us into to this room?”

Vera-san stood. A knock came at the door, and one of the shipmate entered the room.

“Milady, it’s time to depart.”

She took out the pocket watch handing at her hip, and checked the time

“Right on time. Very well, let us be off.”

“Yes!”

The sailor left the room, sending a mildly surprised expression at me at the end. The door closed, and after a while, the outside scenery began to move.

Vera-san breathed out a sigh.

“I’m not even the captain, but it somehow got to be like this. Sorry. And as for why I called you here… I wanted to hear what you had to say. You’re adventurers after all. You know some interesting stories, don’t you?”

Vera-san’s expectant eyes. And all my comrades sent their eyes towards me.

“… What’s all this?”

Shannon spoke as a representative.

“I mean, if it’s interesting stories, you’re all we’ve got, Lyle.”

Monica as well.

“Yes, when the chicken is in peak condition, it’s a splendid time of laughter and tears.”

I tried to correct Monica’s statement.

“Please don’t act as if my peak condition, is only post-Growth.”

There, Eva looked at me, and put her hand to her mouth in shock.

“… Eh?”

May was the same. She put both of her hands behind her head.

“No, no matter how you look at it…”

When I looked at Aria, she averted her eyes.

“Sorry. I can’t defend you here.”

I turned my body towards Clara, and she turned red to her eats.

“I apologize. I ended up remembering it…”

Timidly sending my eyes at Miranda…

“Peak condition… in a sense, it really is you at your best.”

She was laughing. At the end, I looked at Novem.

“Whichever Lyle-sama you may be, you’re the best Lyle-sama to me.”

She gave a radiant smile.

But within the Jewel, I heard some laughing voices.

『That’s right! mr. lyle is surely his peak condition!』
『Regardless of his usual failure, you’ll never see anything like that from mr. lyle!』
『… Stop it… pff…』
『As expected of the Wonder Child of the Walt house. The cutting edge of your post-Growth is the greatest in all our history. I guarantee it.』

I fell onto my knees, and planted my hands into the ground. On top of the slowly swaing boat, I…

“That’s a lie. That man isn’t me!”

Hearing those words, Vera-san looked a little interested.

“Ah, so you’ve made a few blunders post-Growth? I do feel sorry to ask, but… oh, why not.”

It didn’t take long for my comrades to start talking about my past mistakes.

9 - Sahuagin Assault

The second day at sea.

I opened my eyes in the room I'd been given on the swaying ship.

As I stretched my body, I heard some voices from the hall.

Eva's and Clara's voices.

"I…won't last if this goes on much longer."

"I-I feel sick."

I scratched my head. Unused to travelling by sea, the two of them had been seasick since yesterday. When I rose, Monica called over to me.

"Good morning, Chicken Dickwad."

I rubbed my sleepy eyes, and looked at her. Without a doubt, she was in my room, preparing my change of clothes.

"… I locked the door, right?"

Looking at the door, the turner on the handle was definitely in the locked position.

"Before I, Monica, a lock of that level is akin to nothing. Before the grand task of taking care of my damn chicken, a lock of that level isn't even an obstacle! Ah, wince we're swaying, I prepared a wet towel today."

I accepted the towel soaked in cold water, wiped off my face, and decided not to think too hard about Monica. I got the feeling a lock like this one wasn't actually too hard to open.

So I asked about my other companions.

"It sounds like Eva and Clara are having it rough, but how about the others?"

Monica took the towel back, before taking out a morning outfitting set from between her skirt and apron, and motioning me towards a chair. I sat, and she began to set my hair.

“That Novem bitch is nursing Aria and May. Since that little girl Shannon was in quite a horrible state, Miranda is dealing with her. Quite a bit happened through the night. Even as you say it, your face isn’t in its best complexion either, Chicken Dickhead.”

As expected an unfamiliar ship voyage. What’s more with it being the second day, I was beginning to show signs of fatigue. I sighed, and asked about Shannon, who seemed to be in the worst state.

“So the worst one is Shannon. It must be an ordeal to clean her room.”

Monica finished setting my hair, and took out a cup with a smile. She didn’t tell me to drink it, but to use the semi-transparent green liquid within it to rinse out my mouth.

“No such problems. I, Monica: Full Options Version, am not just for show. I have long since completed the room’s cleaning and laundry.”

From the Jewel, I heard the Seventh’s voice.

『This automaton. Could it be she’s actually quite proficient? Her usual conduct is all unbelievable, but it may actually be true she’s the concentration of the wisdom of the ancients.』

I had almost forgotten from her usual behavior, but Monica did serve me faithfully. And there were many times I’d been saved by her high specs.

The Fourth didn’t seem too satisfied with that.

『And wait, why did the ancients make an automaton like this, I wonder? I get the feeling it’s a waste of technology, or something… oh right, Lyle, are you alright? We haven’t arrived at the expanse of sea in question yet, but you haven’t been rendered immobile, have you?』

The reason we were taken on as guards for the Vera Trēs was

because the ship would be passing through an expanse of sea with increased monster attacks as of late. There was no choice but to pass through it, and with it known that a number of ships had been destroyed and sunken already, they had no choice but to hire guards.

Or course, from the Trēs House's reaction, they didn't think anything would happen to their goddess of fortune, but as a just-in-case measure, they had put out the job.

I felt a bit sluggish, as I clenched the Jewel to inform the Fourth I was alright. Shen I stood, Monica presented my change of clothes.

"You… whatever."

When I took them, Monica made a triumphant expression.

"Hmm, if we go on like this, you'll become a no-good human being who can't live without me by your side. It's alright. I'll look after you until you die."

Those words didn't make me happy at all. But I undressed, and tossed my outer garments aside.

❼

Outside… I went out onto the deck. After a light meal, I went out to suck in the outside air.

The one who came with me was a pale-faced Eva. She had also come to take in the great outdoors, but ended up that I had to lend her a shoulder.

"Oy, are you really alright?"

Eva's breathing was out of order, and her complexion was terrible.

"I-I'm fine. They told me I can just vomit into the sea if I have to."

This girl isn't fine at all. As I thought that, I sighed, and headed over to a spot on the deck where we wouldn't be a hindrance.

Gripping the railing, she stared into the distance. It looks like she was trying out the seasickness countermeasure she heard from the sailors.

“… I should’ve stayed at the mansion.”

Her eyes were teary now, but I did in fact recommend she stay behind. Both she and can Clara showed interest in visiting foreign lands, and tagged themselves alone.

I rubbed her back, as I spoke tiredly.

“You’re already here, so just give it up. By the third day, you should get used to it. Even so, for the land to be so far away.”

On the left side of our course, I could see some land in the distance.

Eva looked at the land.

“I want to go back to land.”

And complained.

When I supported her weakened back, a voice called to us from behind. I turned to find Vera, her red parasol out, and her long bunches of hair swaying in the salty breeze.

“You’re quite out of it. Is it your first time on a ship?”

“For both me and my comrades, it’s the first for almost all of us. We hail from Bahnseim, you see, so we never had much a chance with the sea.”

Bahnseim barely had a coast. Even if it had lakes, it wasn’t a place with much relation to the ocean.

Holding her parasol in her right hand, and stroking her hair with her left, Vera-san approached me.

“In contrast, I’ve barely seen a scene outside the ocean. Never climbed a mountain before. Is it any fun?”

I tried to remember climbing a mountain, and the memories of when I went on a picnic with my family ended up coming back to me. We

had guards around, and they watch over our family with a smile.

And my mother and father smiled gently, and Celes was…

When I tried to remember, I ended up holding my left hand against half my face.

(Celes was… huh? What sort of face did she make again?)

No matter how hard I tried to remember, I couldn't recall. Vera-san approached me.

"Are you alright? Don't push yourself, and get some rest. The stretch of sea we hired you for is still a few days away, so you can use your time up 'til then to get used to the boat."

I shook my head.

"No, I'm fine. And Eva's…"

Looking over to Eva, her pale face was swelling, and she was holding her mouth.

"EVVVAAAAAAA!!"

"I-it's no good…"

As Vera-san gave a wry smile, she spun her parasol and gave some advice.

"When you want to spit up, it'll be painful if there's nothing in your stomach. Eat a little, and drink some water. Alcohol is out of the question."

She took out a handkerchief, and when she handed it to me, I ended up bewildered. Because it was quite an expensive-looking handkerchief.

"Use it. Wipe off her mouth. It's a waste of her good looks."

As I wiped Eva's mouth, the sailors hurriedly emerged onto the deck.

And the one on lookout rung the bell, and shouted out in a loud voice.

"Enemy attack! Enemy Ataaaack!!"

Vera folded her parasol, and tossed it over to me.

After reaching for the holster at the back of her hip, she pulled out a golden gun. Its grip had a black gemstone embedded in it.”That’s my favorite parasol, so don’t lose it, okay?”

Seeing the golden gun, the Seventh was filled with intrigue.

『So it’s a revolver type! In my time, they were much larger, and only had four chambers… hmm, it even has six! The barrel is still wrong, but it’s more square then round, huh? The hammer portion’s been compacted… nice! I want one, Lyle!』

I myself did not. But I did honestly think it looked cool. And when Vera-san held it, I felt it made for a pretty painting.

Pushing her hair back, she confirmed the cylinder, and looked around.

“Take it as usual. Make sure not to hit one another! Damage the boat, and you’re food for the fishes, you got that!”

“Yep!”
“Leave it to us, milady!”
“We’ll make beehives out of them!’

They all took their weapons, and gathered on the deck. Sabres in their hands. And among them, there were some sailors with guns as well. They weren’t handguns, but two handed ones with barrels longer than a meter.

The Fifth spoke.

『They’re all equipped with knives on their ends?』

The Fourth just noticed it now.

『So if you run out of bullets, it becomes a spear… in that sense, maybe guns aren’t bad?』

The Seventh shouted out in high spirits.

『I know, right!? I know, right!? I’m certain that guns will change the world!』

But the Third was a bit negative.

『… If you fight with that, you know, the iron part of the gun? Won't the area that sends out the bullets bend out of place?』

The Seventh gave an excuse.

『… It's quite delicate, so it's possible it'll become unusable. But still! It will be right as rain after some servicing! And it's an incredible weapon you can use to fight, even if you run out of bullets, is it not!?』

While listening to the voices of my ancestors, I snapped my fingers, and a treasure chest manifested on the deck. I took out two sabres from it.

And as I did that, I handed Eva the parasol.

"It's apparently precious, so don't dirty it. Well, I feel it'll end in a jiffy."

After drawing the sabres, I left the scabbards with her as well.

"I won't. But they clearly look like they know what they're doing. Are we even necessary?"

I did think Eva was on the mark. There, the Second's Skill… All… detected the presence of monsters around. Holding hostility towards, us, they jumped out onto the deck.

Their forms… we had seen the in the Labyrinth before. They were Sahuagins.

But compared to the past Sahuagins, the color of their scales and skin was more ominous, and quite a few of them had scars here and there.

Their movements had a sense of sharpness we didn't witness in the Labyrinth.

Vera held up her golden gun with one hand, and discharged it.

Smoke broke out of the muzzle, and one of the Sahuagins that had landed on the ship had its head blown off.

The deck was splattered with an eerie greenish-blue blood, and with that as a signal, Sahuagins started leaping from the water's surface one after the next with harpoons in their hands.

I stood to protect Eva behind me. One of them rolled across the deck, raised its body in front of me, and took a stance.

But after I heard a gunshot, the Sahuagin was blown off to the side.

When I looked in the opposite direction to its trajectory, I saw Vera expressionlessly pointing her gun.

The Seventh's spirits rose even higher.

『She modified her gun into a Magic Tool! They've gotten that far… what's more, with that caliber, for her to be able to handle the gun with one hand!』

I was glad he was enjoying himself, but I myself was sweating.

"Please don't hit us."

Vera-san shot another Sahuagin that approached her, opened the cylinder of her gun, and began swapping out bullets.

The burnt-through shells fell to the floor, and I could hear a number of light metallic sounds. Around, the sailors were in the middle of battle, and I could hear gunshots, and curses.

After loading all her bullets, Vera-san spoke.

"Then please don't move. And the next ones are coming."

It seems the range she could sense was vaster than the Second's First Stage All, as Sahuagins began leaping out of the water she was staring out at.

Even though the ship's deck had quite an elevation, what jumping power those monsters must have. I thought, as I slashed from bottom up at a Sahuagin coming at me with its harpoon, and cleanly bisected it.

Taking out monsters one after another, Vera-san voiced her admiration.

“You’re not famous for nothing. That was quite a clean cut.”

She said as she unloaded her gun on the next enemy. Her nonchalant face as she continued shooting down Sahuagin caused me to break into a cold sweat.

Her dress wasn’t stained by a drop of blood. But it looked to me as if it was dyed red with it.

“They just keep on coming. There really are a lot.”

She spoke fed-up, as she consecutively shot three shots at the water, and one of the Sahuagin that leapt out fell straight back down.

The seaman on lookout cried out.

“Big one coming! The headless one’s come out!”

Vera waved her left hand to the side, and raised her voice.

“Prepare the cannons! The enemy is a slow one! Take your time, and set your aim!”

When I looked at the water, I saw what appeared to be a turtle shell surfacing. A few hundred tentacles were protruding from it, and it was approaching the ship.

“A Shell Jellyfish, is it? I heard they’re called things like headlesses, or one eyeds. ”

I moved close to the rail, and Eva stood as well to look at the monster about half as large as the ship itself.

“If something like that attacks… Lyle, look down!”

Hearing that, I looked down at the hull. A hatch on it opened, and from it a large cannon was pointed out. But it wasn’t the sort of cannon I knew of.

“It’s overly long and narrow.”

For the Sahuagin approaching me from behind, I chucked the Sabre in my left hand. It spun in the air before sticking into its head. And

the monster slowly fell dead on its back.

When I turned my eyes back to the water, Vera-san issued out orders.

“How are the preparations?”

“Ready any time!”

The sailor heard something from the barrel sticking out of the wall, and stuck up his thumb to Vera-san to inform her the preparations were ready.

Vera-san grinned.

“Don’t think you’ll be able to break our hull so easily… Fire!!”

The five cannons protruding out let off fire, and the ship shook greatly. And Novem and Miranda burst onto the deck.

“Lyle-sama!”

“Christ! If they hadn’t told us not to go out… wait, what’s that…”

Novem looked at me in worry, while Miranda watched the large monster shell burst open, and sink.

Looking around, the Sahuagins were beginning to flee. And the battle was nearing its end.

The cannon’s bombardment had destroyed the shell, and with blood gushing out, the monster sunk back down to the ocean’s depths. Watching that scene, Vera-san returned her revolver back to its holster.

“That’s our fighting power. How about it? You still think we need guards?”

To her provoking eyes, I ended up giving a wry smile.

“You have a point. But if you have that much power, I must wonder why we were hired. They must worry for you quite a bit.”

Seeing they definitely didn’t need our help, I laughed in self derision.

But Vera-san stroked her hair a bit sorrowfully.

“… That’s just an excuse. He just wants people to think he’s doing what he can. It’s always like that. Tying me down to this ship. The hell’s goddess of fortune supposed to mean?”

As she looked up at the sky, her profile looked as if she were enduring something.

… At the same time.

(H-huh…? Why is my vision shaky… and my body suddenly feels heavy…)

I was unsteady on my feet, and Novem and Miranda rushed over to me.

“Lyle-sama!”

“This isn’t happening. I never thought it would…”

The abnormalities of my body caused me to break into a cold sweat.

“… Why… at a time like this…”

From the Jewel, the Ancestors were…

『Hmhmm. It’s finally come, has it. What off timing he has.』

『No, I’m sure you mean perfect.』

『We have some time. I do hope he recovers before we reach the stretch of ocean in question, but…』

『Well, whatever the case… as I thought, Lyle’s sure got it. To go through a Growth with this timing.』

In my head.

(It’s a lie. This can’t be… someone tell me it’s a lie!!)

As I headed for a Growth, my insides filled with dread.

10 - Trident

The guest room I used to sleep.

In it, I lay, dead tired from the break of dawn. I'm sure my face was quite pale. It was painful to move, and I felt terrible.

A bucket was left nearby, and Novem was in the room nursing me.

"Lyle-sama, are you alright? Do you want some water?"

The deterioration of physical state before a Growth.

It was coming out in me quite evidently, and I was also being battered by seasickness. From yesterday evening, I'd already spit up a number of times, and caused trouble for Novem and Monica.

Shannon stopped by the room to observe my state.

"Uwah, how terrible…"

She looked over my weakened form with a delighted face. Behind her, stood Monica with laundry in hand.

"Little girl. The Chicken Dickhead's Fever Time is coming. Please quiet down."

She looked down at Shannon with an unpleasant expression, but when she looked at me, she was smiling…

"Chicken Dickhead, I've washed your sheets, and your clothes are in perfect condition! Now how about a change? You can't greet your Fever Time in such wet and sticky clothes."

She was truly delighted as she recommended for me to change. Novem gave a biter smile, as she stood, and extended a hand to me to help me stand.

But taking her hand was a pain.

"Just leave me alone. And I'm definitely not failing this time. You hear

that? Not happening! I've already failed four times. The fifth time… the fifth time onwards will be different."

When I pulled my blanket over my head, Shannon laughed.

"It's impossible. Definitely impossible. Now embarrass yourself more."

There, Novem embraced me, and carefully lifted my body. I was probably making a terrible face, but she smiled as she sat me up, and began stripping off my clothes.

"If you wipe down your body, you'll feel relieved. Okay, Lyle-sama?"

Seeing her nurse me so kindly, I heard a voice from the Jewel. It was the Fourth's voice.

『He's not matured at all from the start. You're bringing back some memories. At the first inn, she washed your hair, while you remained unmindful, and treated it as natural.』

The one who followed through for me was the Seventh.

『Hey, his health will be shot out until he's done with his Growth. There's no helping it for now. But thinking back to the beginning, you've sure grown quite a bit, Lyle.』

The Fifth's voice was just a little lower than usual.

『… It's become lonelier here than it was at the start, thought.』

The Third sounded as aloof as usual.

『But it's gotten lively around Lyle, so isn't it all fine? See, we shouldn't even be here to begin with. Think of it as a spot of fortune we get to witness Lyle's Growth.』

They were acting as if it were a good thing, but I could feel nothing but malice from the 'Growth' part of it.

(Are they talking about that mr. lyle again? Dammit, it's definitely these guys fault that I was never able to restrain myself before!)

And since I left the House, I get the feeling my personality has taken

quite a run for the worse.

❼

… Aria called out to Miranda, who was reading a book in their room.

Clara had gotten quite used to the boat, but her health declined whenever she tried reading, so she was outside taking in the outside air for now.

Aria had finished her daily training on the deck, so she had returned to the room with a towel around her shoulders.

“Where’s Shannon?”

Miranda didn’t take her eyes off the book, sitting atop the bed, flipping through the pages.

“At Lyle’s place. That girl’s too curious to help it.”

Aria’s face turned a little red, and she touched her hand to it to hide her embarrassment.

“Yeah, he’s been in that state for a few days now. He’s sure to be in high tensions once he gets up.”

Miranda continued reading the book as she conversed with Aria.

“In a sense, that’s him at his best. He doesn’t feel the slightest bit of shame or embarrassment, so that’s around the only time that man can show off his abilities to his fullest extent. He’s never gone out to battle like that before, but I really wonder whether he’s stronger than the usual Lyle.”

Aria hung her towel over the railing of the bunk, and took off her clothes. After taking off the garments that had been stuck to her skin from her sweat, she began looking through her bags for a change.

“It’s common to make mistakes in a post-Growth state, so isn’t it a general rule to avoid battle?”

“… That’s right, but I can’t help but wonder. In all actuality, just how

strong is a serious Lyle? Aren't you curious?"

After wiping down her body and changing, Aria sat on her bed.

"Serious? He's still holding back?"

Perhaps Miranda had finished the book, as she closed it, and set it on the bed.

"He's not. But just what would happen if he used all his Skills to their fullest. Lyle has eight whole Skills, does he not? Even if they're Support Class, shouldn't that number be formidable? That blue gem of his has been handed down for generations, so there are no duplicate Skills in it; it's needlessly amazing."

Unable to comprehend the meaning behind her words, Aria tilted her head. So Miranda sighed, and gave an explanations.

"You listening? When you're in a time of crisis, and you have no choice but to manifest a Skill, then it's common for body-strengthening, or some other simple Skill to manifest. But if you have those simple Skills from the start, you're going to get something different, right?"

Aria nodded.

"I kinda get it. My red gem also has a body-strengthening Skill. And wait, I still don't really know how it differs from Lyle."

Similar strengthening Skills.

The red gem contained a strengthening Skill of the Vanguard Class.

The blue gem one, a strengthening Skill of the Support Class.

But even if there were some differences here and there, they demonstrated similar effects. Miranda raised her hands in the air, and assumed a pose of surrender.

"There's no way a non-specialist like me would be able to explain it. But you can tell there are some subtle differences, right? More importantly, I'll be rotating out with Novem, and taking care of Lyle tonight. I'll be getting some sleep now, so please don't wake me."

Miranda brought the book to a small desk in the room, lay down, draped the blanket over herself, and closed her eyes.

Aria spoke.

“Eh? I never heard anything about… and she’s already asleep!”

Seeing Miranda instantly fall asleep, Aria began to think over how she would spend the rest of her day…

❼

… Beim; Lyle’s mansion.

In the large estate, Maksim was swinging about his spear in the yard to polish up his Skills.

Automaton No. 2 was maintaining the yard, and the two of them were the only ones visible in the entirety of the vast mansion.

Maksim endlessly repeated the basic movements, wiped off his sweat, and was about to take a break, when he heard a scream from the mansion.

It was Adele.

“WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIIIIIS!!”

“Lady Adele!!”

Maksim threw his towel aside, took up his spear, and leapt into the mansion, heading straight for Adele’s room.

Automaton No. 2 collected up Maksim’s towel, and offered a line.

“If this was masters, I’d preserve and worship it… hah, let’s get back to work.”

She muttered that.

Bursting into Adele’s room, Maksim saw the girl fall prostrate over her desk, and called out.

“Are you alright, milady!?”

Slowly raising her face, Adele sought salvation from Maksim with teary eyes.

“I’m not alright. Just what is this mountain of paperwork? Why is paperwork from Zayin and Lorphys being delivered straight to Mr. Lyle’s mansion in Beim!?”

Maksim looked at the mountain of forms.

“… He’s a hero who’s done magnificent service for both countries, so I don’t believe it strange for these sorts of documents to come. I-is it strange?”

There, Adele hit her palms against the desk top a number of times.

“Of course it is! Why are the reports coming here!? Why are the proposals seeking his authorization!? Just what did that man do!? What’s more, this letter from the Princess of Lorphys… it’s a freaking love poem! What is this!? What did you do, Mr. Lyle!?”

Maksim hung his head in regret.

“I apologize, milady. There is nothing much I can do to…”

Adele let out a sigh.

“Then can you get me a refill on my drink, Maksim? They’re apparently going to be picked up today evening, so I’ll have to have them done by then.”

He took a cup from a tired Adele. Maksim put his spear under his armpit, and held the cup quite preciously, as he left the room.

“I’ll have it ready at once!”

As Maksim dashed down the hallway, automaton maid No. 1…

“Don’t run in the halls.”

Offered him a warning…

❼

… It was around when the ship voyage was entering its sixth day.

Lyle was still bed-ridden.

At this point, it was agony for him to even let out words, and if someone talked to him, they'd only get a, 'meh…' or, 'yeah…' in response.

The bridge was about to enter dangerous water, so Vera had checked his room to confirm he was still in a horrible state.

The captain asked Vera about the state of her bodyguards, aka Lyle's Party.

"Milady, how are the adventurers faring? A few of them are moving around quite calmly, but the man has yet to show himself, so the sailors are getting worried."

Rather than worry, they were beginning to wonder if he'd really be of any use.

Vera reported what she'd seen without any falsehoods.

"He's still in a pre-Growth, and absolutely no good. The timing was too bad. They really are out there, those luckless folks. Whatever adventurers, once they got to be first rate, I thought they would have to be the luckier ones, but it looks like that man is different."

The captain pulled his cap down, and gave a dry smile.

"Well that's quite a… anyways, we have you with us, milady, so there's nothing to worry about."

Vera's expression hardened a bit, but she immediately smiled.

"Those goddess of fortune rumors again? Don't go there. They drive all the men away, and I'm quite troubled here."

The captain raised a loud laugh.

"Then it's the men who've got no eyes for women. You're a fine

woman, milady, so they'll flock to you whether you like it or not someday."

Vera offered a light response of, 'and how nice that would be,' but inside, she didn't feel all that well.

(The ones who draw close are all just after the money. And when I'm out here on the ocean, just how do you expect me to meet a people? Good grief…)

Vera recalled her younger sister, and the young servant who'd worked at the mansion. Their ages were around the same, and the boy who assisted in work around the mansion… he had been Vera's first love.

She wasn't still dragging it out. But when that boy grew to the age where he could take a ship out to sea, it was her sister he had begun to court. The sisters weren't at odds, and Vera even said she'd support her.

(… Before I knew it, he had started speaking to her normally, yet I was always a milady, wasn't I. I've always been called heartless, but it's honestly quite rough.)

She knew the red parasol the boy had given her as a present was something her sister put out money for, and asked him to buy.

Her sister was likely trying to be mindful, But Vera found herself becoming pitiful.

(If father recognizes it, he's sure to be the successor. And I'll be stuck on this ship forever, will I…)

She herself had yet to recognize their relations. But Vera was under the impression that one wasn't a problem of time. The young servant was talented, and blessed with an earnest personality.

And that was the part that had drawn her in as well.

(Hah, I really should have talked with him some more… once I get back, the three of us can sit down for a nice long…)

When she thought to herself, a voice came from one of the

numerous metal tubes on the bridge. It was the one connected to the lookout post.

『I-I can see something! And the sky is clouding over…』

The captain shouted at the panicking sailor to get some more definite information.

Vera looked out the window of the bridge, before rushing out of it.

“What’s all this? There wasn’t any wind before… and this is…”

The weather had been splendid right up that point. Sea birds were flying around the vessel, but now they had disappeared entirely. Swirling rain clouds were spiraling their way into the sky, and as rain began to fall, Vera pushed her black hair back, and looked ahead.

When she gripped a nearby railing, the boat began to rock violently.

A sailor followed her, and told her to return.

“Milady, quickly go inside! You’ll get wet!”

Vera was looking straight in the direction of the boat’s trajectory. And after pointing her hand at the sailor, she immediately gave orders.

“Turn this boat around! Port or starboard, I don’t care! Change our course at once!”

But pushing the sailor to the side, the captain popped out his head.

“Milady! The rudder isn’t working! It’s as if we’re being pulled in, reeled in ahead!”

Vera mortifyingly looked straight ahead.

There, showing its face from the water surface, was a large monster… no, one known as a god of the seas, a【Trident Serpent】was looking their way.

It had three heads, and the middle one looked just like its namesake… from the sides of its jaw, grew sharp protrusions unidentifiable as horns or fangs; they were made of an unknown metallic substance.

Such protrusion weren't on the other heads, but she noticed the six eyes of the three heads were looking their way.

She could only despair. It was several times larger than the Vera Trēs, and from the eyes of sailors, a monster that was a difficult one to even try and survive against. Yes, it was a monster, and even if it was called a god of the seas, it was looking on them as prey.

A little below where its heads forked off, she could see a large fin. It was floating on the surface, waiting for them to draw closer.

And on the deck, the sailors, sat, and held their heads.

Seeing the Trident Serpent, the Captain pulled his cap down as far as it went.

"… Get off the ship, milady. With a small boat, there's still a chance you'll get out alive."

Vera slowly turned to look at the captain.

"There's no way I could run. It's the currents pulling this ship in."

Looking at the swirling water surface centered on the Trident Serpent, Vera lowered her fist into the rail.

"… To hell with goddess of fortune. Just look at this."

She knew she wouldn't be able to see her family again, but even so, maybe that was a means to escape from her current locked-down situation.

And she shook her head.

(The hell am I thinking about? If we sink here, I'll really sink to the ocean's depths… ocean's depths? You're telling me that was a prophetic dream?)

Raising a face taken aback, Vera vexingly grit her teeth.

"… Prepare for battle. Take out the cannons. We can't just leave this god of the seas to do as he pleases forever!"

Bu the sailors were making expressions of despair.

“But milady… it’s a god we’re up against.”
“Nothing good’ll come of it. Pointing a gun at the god of the seas.”
“There’s no way a cannon’ll take down a god…”

The captain seemed to have given up as well. Of all else, that’s just how overwhelming the opponent was. The center head looked as if it were wearing a crown. A golden crown, and those sharp golden blades on the sides of its mouth.

Together with is jaw, it looked like a three-pronged spear.

Lightning fell from the clouds, and lit up the dark shadow of the Trident Serpent in a pale blue light. Its blue scales beautifully reflected the seven colors of the rainbow, as it eagerly awaited the arrival of its prey.

Vera wrung out her voice once more.

“Prepare for battle! We’re not going to let ourselves go down just like that! This is a state-of-the-art ship, is it not!”

But a single sailor…

“… Even so, god of the seas there.”

They were in despair, and none of the seamen even tried to make a move. So Vera hit her fist against the railing again.

As the rain grew stronger, Vera glared at the Trident Serpent before her eyes… and there, she noticed.

Atop the deck, the form of the young man with blue hair.

The boy who should’ve been sick and asleep blatantly ignored the sailors curling up, and headed for the front of the boat.

He was soaked by the rain, yet he continued across the shaking vessel, looked at the enemy, and…

“Peeerfect!! Wonderful! That large frame, that heroic silhouette, that majesty!! You must be a worthy opponent for my magnificence!”

Vera leaned in as she heard that elated voice.

“What does he intend to do over there…”

Lyle spread his arms out with in the rain, and shouted out in a loud voice.

“A splendid opponent to commemorate this Growth! You shall… become the fuel for my money-raising schemes!! Fwahaha, FWAHAHAHA… *cough*! Swallowed a little seawater. The water spray here is awful.”

Before the giant enemy, Lyle raised a loud laugh. And when the waves crashed into the boat, and sent ocean water into the air, he swallowed it, and broke into a coughing fit…

11 - The Goddesses have a Thing for Those that Fight on

Within the storm, I looked at the giant Trident Serpent in the middle of the whirlpool.

I crossed my arms, and from the water spray, my body was soaked. On the deck, Novem and the others were calling out for me to return.

While it doesn't really matter, I have to say my soaked body is twenty percent cooler than usual.

"Lyle-sama, please come back! You'll get a cold!"

I flipped my hair, and as it was wet, water flew around.

"I'm already sopping wet, so there's no problem. More importantly, Novem, how much cooler do you think I am compared to my normal state…"

There, Monica shook up her twin tails behind Novem.

"You're fifty percent cooler than usual! I've already got tens of thousands of photos of you stored in my memory! My videos are of perfect quality as well!"

Seeing her wriggle her body in delight, I…

"I don't really get it, but you say some nice things. Want me to take my shirt off as a public service?"

There, Aria looked at me, and yelled. She gripped the railing, and turned her eyes to the giant enemy… the Trident… too long, let's just call it Tressy.

"Just come back already! A monster like that's come out! You do know why we're here, don't you!? We're guards! Guards!"

Her red hair was wet, and since she usually preferred clothing fit

close to her body, when wet I could make out her body's lines quite clearly.

"That's precisely why I'm here. By the way, I'm quite amazing in the nude, you know? You sure you don't want to see?"

"Why did you have to come out with this timing!!?"

Aria cried out, but Monica was excitedly looking in my direction. As I thought, I really should take it off. I reached for my shirt.

There, Vera-san who'd come out on deck, called out to me.

"Painful Growth guy over there! Shut up, and listen to orders! I'm cancelling the guard request. I've no intent to tell you to fight something like that. Begin the preparations to escape at once!"

On top of the deck, the crouching sailors raised their heads at the thought of escape. But the sea was slowly spiraling inwards with Tressy at the base, and it didn't look like a small boat would be able to escape.

The currents would probably swallow it up and sink it.

I…

"Cancel? That would be troubling. That thing over there is my prey. I've especially taken a liking to Tressy's crown! I want it! While I'm at it, I'll do my job, and get money in my hands!"

I clenched my fist in the air to emphasize my point, and the sailors, and my comrades that'd come out on deck looked dumbfounded. As a representative, Vera pointed at me.

"What the hell's a Tressy?"

"Isn't it cute? Trident Serpent's too long so, I've decided it now."

"Cute or not is irrelevant! That's a monster called the god of the seas! Even if you try turning a blade on it, nothing will come of it! … We can only run away!"

As she hung her head vexingly, Vera-san seemed to be emotionally opposed. On the deck, the sailors had all gathered to discuss their

escape.

Miranda pulled Shannon by the hand, and approached me.

“Lyle, what are you doing!?”

Behind a surprised Miranda, Eva and May were looking at me. No, they were looking beyond me, at Tressy.

Showing all three of its heads above the water, and patiently waiting for us; what an honest fellow.

“… For real?”

Eva said that, and May’s bearing was different than usual.

“This one’s… impossible, even for me. I can see why the sea’s divine beasts haven’t done anything about it.”

It seems there are divine beasts in the sea as well. I’d like to see one, one of these days.

With her staff raised, Clara produced light to illuminate the area without anyone telling her to.

The sky was covered with thick clouds, and the clear sky was turning quite dark.

It felt as if it were night, and the water’s pitch black surface lookd as if it would swallow the lot of us.

As more people gathered on the deck, the ship’s movements gradually ceased resisting the spiraling current. It leisurely went with the flow, gradually bringing us closer to Tressy.

Atop the swaying deck, everyone made expressions of despair as they looked at the monster.

“Why the god of the sea…”
“We even had milady with us.”
“God dammit…”

As the sailors despaired, Vera-san hung her head, made a fist with her hands, and bit down on her Lower lip.

From the Jewel, the ancestors let out their voices.

『That one's a bit too big, isn't it? What's more, we've never fought anything like that. What are you going to do, mr. lyle?』
『Even if you plan to run, it's looking on us as prey. Huh? Does it eat humans? Just how does it fill its stomach with that humongous frame it's got?』
『Do monsters ever get full? Anyways, it's too big to be cute. If only it's eyes were just a little bit rounder…』
『The best option at hand… it would be to use something as bait, and survive… now then, what's your take on the matter, mr. lyle?』

They were placing some expectations on me, so I boldly stood at the bowsprit alone, and pointed at Tressy. In a loud voice…

"Monica, is that a god?"

While Monica was pelted by the sea spray and rain, neither her clothes nor her hair looked wet. She stood perfectly postured, let off a light from her red eyes, and opened her mouth.

"I concluded it is a monster. It's oversized, but I can detect Magic Stones in its body. Well, it does have quite an atmosphere, to say the least. Perhaps it's the crown?"

"It really is a nice piece. I want one. It'll sell for a fortune…. Now then, gentlemen. As you've just heard, that there is no god."

There, one of the sailors called out.

"It's the reincarnation of the goddess! The third goddess… if you go against the sea, it'll draw you into its depths, and steal your soul away!"

It appears they believed in the superstitions. Most of the crew quivered as they huddled together.

I smiled.

"Then there's no problem! My House has been faithful to all the goddesses for generations. Even if I take one down, there's still six to believe in!"

In the Jewel, the Third laughed.

『Oh right. We fundamentally supported all seven goddesses, didn't we. It's true that there won't be much of a problem even if we lose one or two.』

There, Novem looked at me with a conflicted expression, and Aria yelled out.

"You ungrateful heretic! Are you sure it isn't your fault we're being targeted!?"

I calmed down a little, and touched my right hand to my chin.

"You've got a point. I'm a man who's got it… maybe the goddesses are sending down some funds for me. I'm scraping by for now, but daily faith is important, you hear!"

Aria's face turned red, and she muttered something like, 'why is it only at times like these, that he's overflowing with confidence…' so I pointed at Tressy, and made a pose.

"… The goddesses smile on those that fight on!"

Those around were looking at me. As I thought, even if I just randomly threw words out, the magnificent aura I was born with gave birth to persuasive power.

Vera-san raised her face to look at me. A majority of the sailors looked my way as well.

"Just offering your prayers won't get you anywhere. It's to those that fight on to survive, that the goddess will grant her final smile. That goddess of the sea is testing us. And I will take her on… is there anyone to join me? If we achieve victory here, we'll be the ones who challenged god! God slayers! How about it, doesn't it have a splendid ring to it!?"

Fastening herself tight to Miranda, Shannon spoke out in a small voice.

"This guy's definitely messed up in the head."

Genius is never understood by the ordinary man. I've read it in a book once. So this is what they meant, I smiled to myself.

(Fool. Defeat the monster, and we'll be heralded as god slayers. Isn't it perfect!)

Vera0san looked at me, and after taking some deep breathes, she asked.

"Do we have a chance?"

I spoke confidently.

"As long as we're alive, we can win. There is no such thing as a strongest in this world. By the way, I'm only here to fight *because* there's a chance. I, Lyle Walt… have never once faced defeat in my life!"

There, Shannon whispered again.

"… Even when Celes knocked the living daylights out of you?"

Miranda shut her up with a, 'Shhh!'

(Ha, I haven't lost yet. We're still in the middle of the match. And I'm a man who'll reign victorious at the end! My losses up to now were all to lead to my triumph!)

Vera-san looked at my face. And turning around, she issued a manifesto to the sailors.

"Men! Do you seriously intend to leave it all to him!? This ship is *our* ship. You're going to let that guy rampage around as he pleases, while you shut your lips and watch!?"

The crew cast their eyes down.

It was at that moment. The captain took off his hat. And he raised his voice.

"You lot, our goddess of fortune has commanded us to fight! You're going to let that bodyguard adventurer have all the cool parts to himself!? If we lose, it's the end either way. Try to run, and the boat'll

sink. Then what say you we go out with a bang!!”

On those words, the sailors raised their faces and stood. One, and then the next…

“Dammit, it really isn’t my day.”
“If that guard fails, he’s in for a wallop.”
“Tsk, goddess of the sea, and goddess of fortune… a clash of goddesses? How meaningless.”

Seeing them complain as they stood in the rain, Vera-san looked a little surprised.

When the ship took a large sway, I used the momentum to leap and land in front of Vera-san.

The Third spoke.

『It would’ve been interesting if you slipped there.』

He said something like that, but I stood, and faced Vera-san.

“W-what?”

“No, you really are a goddess of fortune. Of all else, when you went to challenge the god of the seas or whatever, you had someone as strong as me aboard your ship… now then, for victory, there’s something I must request.”

Hearing it was for victory, Vera-san made a serious expression. She looked a little tired at the first part, but seeing her face turn serious, I…

“I want a kiss. What’s more, a deep one!”

“… Hah?”

The sailors looked at me in surprise.

“W-what!?”
“Bastard!”
“Oy, someone get the guns!”

I embraced the surprised girl, and used the rocking of the boat to

support the back of her hip with my left hand. It was as if I was holding her up as she was about to fall.

She was too surprised to resist…

“My apologies. But worry not, I’ll make you mine before you know it.”

“You really are crazy!”

I covered up her mouth, and stuck in my tongue. She tried to resist, and push me away, but perhaps finding she couldn’t break free, she soon gave up.

The Fifth let his voice.

『Why can’t Lyle be this assertive on a regular basis?』

The Fourth seemed to be of the same opinion.

『If he was like this normally, it’d all be much easier.』

After a while, I slowly proper her up, and she took a few steps back, as she wiped off her mouth, and glared at me… she opened her eyes wide.

“Y-you… so that’s…. how it is. It really was necessary for victory.”

I smiled.

“I know, right? So won’t you tell the sailors around us to lower their weapons?”

Around me, sailors with bloodshot eyes were holding up their guns, giving off a feeling that they’re pull the trigger at any moment.

“What has he done to the Lady!”
“I’ll blow ‘is ‘ead clean off!”
“You’re food for the fishies!!”

They were looking at me with faces of rage, and prepared to fire at the slightest provocation. But there, Vera-san stopped them.

“Stop it! I hate to admit it, but it was something necessary to win.

Look, the ship's being pulled in! Everyone to your stations! Lyle! After kissing me like that, I definitely won't forgive you if you let us lose!"

I nodded, and looked around. Their fear and tension from before had been somewhat mitigated.

(Now then, I've successfully undone Vera-san's and the sailors' anxiety…)

Looking over the crew members reluctantly put down their guns, and return to their stations, I made a triumphant smile.

"It's only natural. If I don't win here, my name will die. Now then, how about I get a little serious? Monica, stay by my side. May by Shannon. Shannon's eyes will prove essential. Aria, Eva, Clara, stay on the ship. Listen to Vera-san's orders. Novem, Miranda, you'll be stationed on the front and back of the deck."

When I gave out orders, Novem came over to my side.

"Lyle-sama, can we win?"

Hearing that, I…

"We shall! Kill that monster, and we'll be called god slayers, you know? Don't you think it'll be more effective than killing a Land Dragon? We'll be famous once we get back. And it'll get noisy again… good grief."

There, making a bitter smile, Novem looked at me.

"So the goddesses smile on those that fight on, is it… perhaps you're right."

I smiled, and pointed my thumb at myself.

"Right? I, Lyle Walt… I'm confident I can make even a goddess fall for me. More than that, I'm sure they're already swooning over me in heaven. What a sinful man."

Perhaps finding it strange, Novem smiled, and nodded a number of times.

“I’m sure your right.”

Is what she said.

❼

… Vera instantly changed out of her soaked clothes, and took over the bridge.

She held her head with her left hand, and endured the pain. Overflowing with unfamiliar information, she could get a precise understanding of everything around.

(I can tell what’s around the ship. In the sea… even in the ship itself… a Skill of this level, and he can share its use. He really is amazing, isn’t he.)

To her, the captain sent a worried voice.

“Milady?”

“Starboard. And keep throwing Magic Stones into the motion hearth! Get close enough for our cannons to reach.”

“I-is that alright!?”

To a surprised sailor, Vera spoke.

“If our attacks won’t reach, there’s no point at all. And with the cannons, time the firing with that adventurer’s words.”

The sailor was surprised once more.

“A-are you sure it’s alright to leave that much to him?”

“I’ll take responsibility! So why don’t we teach that three headed monster the terror of humans!? And there aren’t enough people on the motion hearth. Hurry and send some support!”

“Y-yes!”

Sending out order after order, Vera verified the image in her head once more.

(I can see it. The movements of people. And I can even hear some voices.)

『God f***ing dammit!! Only mine was a few milliseconds shorter than the others!!』

『Monica, shut up! I'm soaked, and going through hell here! *Cough*! *Hack*!』

『Oh my, Shannon swallowed water again. Didn't you say it'd be fine as long as you could see?』

『Clara, you haven't said anything for a while. Are you fantasizing over something strange again?』

『… Aria-san, I'm not the only one who felt like a pure maiden when he kissed me, was I?』

『It's hot! It's really hot here! They're pouring magic stones into a giant cauldron thing! Because of that, it's really hot!』

『Eva, you quiet down too! Out here, it's freezing, and wet!』

『Lyle-sama, have you gotten the information you needed?』

『Got them from Clara's Skill without a problem. I've found out that I have absolutely no idea what sort of attack it'll make. It's a massive harvest!』

The voices Vera heard in her head were loud, and she held her hand against it.

At the bridge, the sailors hurriedly gave their reports. And Vera transmitted them to Lyle.

『Preparations ready over here. Can I leave firing the cannon to you?』

There, Lyle gave a response.

『Leave it to me. If we don't win, we've no future… how did that line come out?』

『As expected of Lyle-sama.』

『Do your job properly! Why are you so laid back!? There's a giant monster right before your eyes! Why did you have to come out with this timing… you're a nuisance!』

On the words of the girl called Shannon, Lyle…

『I do think I'm restraining it more than usual, you know? See, my aura is simply different from a normal humans, so it's quite a trial to contain it. Even if I may say irresponsible things, I do believe in all of you. As I thought, this must be a talent I've been born with.』

Vera began to become a little anxious over Lyle's words, but after them, she got the feeling she heard the voices of some other males.

『No doubt about it. This has got to be a talent.』
『Right. Finding a man of this caliber isn't too easy…』
『Hey, think we'll get anything better than, I can make even a goddess fall for me?』
『It's only just begun, has it not. Oh, we've connected to a strange line… ah.』

The voices suddenly cut off, and Vera shook her head a number of time. The voices she heard were male… what's more, they didn't belong to Lyle, but a wide array of men. Hearing those voices in their early thirties, it sounded as if they were actually enjoying the present situation.

(… Seriously, what?)

As Vera thought that, the ship moved, and approached Tressy.

"Milady! We've got it in the range of the cannons!"

"Don't fire yet! Wait for the order!"

(Kuh, I don't have the leisure to think over it now.)

As Vera concentrated on Tressy, the voices resounding through her head gradually began to turn serious. But Lyle alone was…

『Ah, a catchphrase! Don't you think I need a catchphrase! Dammit, I wasn't able to say the usual, 'let's have fun with it'…』

Still on cloud nine…

❼

On top of the deck, I stood around the center with Monica to my side.

The metallic blunt weapon we had once recovered from a boss in Arumsaas. Monica had repaired it, and turned it into a cannon.

Taking a stance with the cannon that didn't match her small and slender body, Monica spoke to me.

"This weapon is incomplete. And it hasn't even been test fired. Our ammunitions number a minimal five armor piercing shells, two explosive ones. I can calibrate it after the first shot, but we're in a storm. The distance considered, please think of our chances of landing a hit to be considerably low."

As she held up that unperfected cannon, I spoke to her.

"It's more than enough. For now, as he's standing there so elegantly, we'll have to show him we're just a bit serious."

Monica tilted her head.

"Are you certain you wish to anger it?"

I looked down the barrel twice Monica's height, as I replied.

"If we see we can't inflict a severe wound with that, we'll just have to move on to the next means. In that case, it would be easier to defeat it if it came closer. Now then, guess I should take a swing at it too."

I took the Jewel in my left hand, removed it from my neck, and had its silver ornaments take the form of a large bow. The longbow had a length that exceeded my height, and no string. But by pouring in Mana, a pale blue light spanned it, and formed a thread.

"I'm connected to you with a line. Want me to try calibrating it?"

There, Monica spoke.

“Please don’t underestimate me. If it’s only to land a blow, it’s an easy task. Our scales of precision are different. But are you sure you won’t aim for the center of its head? I get the feeling it’s quite clearly its weak point.”

In regards to her, I…

“We can’t have that crown fly away on us. Well, it’s best if it doesn’t… I’ll take the center head.”

Saying that, I drew back the bow, and an arrow of light began to take shape. What was initially light in the vague shape of an arrow slowly recreated an arrow’s shape down to its finer details.

After taking enough time to set my aim…

“Don’t sink from this.”

I shot the arrow. That pale blue arrow flew straight at the right head, and landed on the mark, and the enemy seemed to take notice of it, as it moved its head.

But…

“Armor piercing round coming up. Please cover your hears, and open your mouth.”

I followed Monica’s orders, as the cannon breather fires, and Monica endured its impact. The wood of the deck grated, and the entire ship shook alongside it.

Water spray hit the gun barrel, and evaporated to coat it in white smoke.

In my head, I could hear Vera’s voice.

『Wait a minute! It’s more powerful than ours, isn’t it!? If you were carrying such a weapon around, then you should’ve just said it!』

But as I took my hands from my ears, I looked at the left head the shell had hit. There wasn’t a doubt my arrow had hit the right one either.

The smoke cleared, and perhaps the head that'd been hit had flown into a rage, as it pointed itself at the sky, and let out a roar. The intense vibrations of the air could even be felt where we stood.

The momentum of the whirlpool increased, and we began to pick up speed.

The middle head opened its mouth with, and in it, a blue lump of Mana began to form, and expand. I could confirm it with Skills.

Using the information obtained through Shannon's demon eyes, and…

What I gained from the Second's, and Sixth's Skill, my conclusion was…

"If it hits, we'll be blown to smithereens. That isn't good."

Monica looked at my face.

"Despite that, you seem to be having some fun."

"It's simple. We just don't let it hit. Novem, Miranda, deploy it on my orders. And fire the starboard cannons on my order. Vera-san please increase the ship's speed. It's fine if we get closer."

My Skill… the Conection link related responses from Novem, Miranda and Aria.

『The preparations are complete.』

『Don't let it hit… you make it sound so easy.』

『Ready anytime.』

Vera-san.

『If you're going to give orders, give them sooner. We can't make sudden movements!』

Tressy's center head opened its mouth towards us, and fired off that blue ball of magic. It was distant, and I could make out its movements quite clearly, but as it came closer, it looked as if it was picking up speed.

I swung my right hand to the side.

“Deploy Magic Shield!”

Novem and Miranda deployed their magic, and for only an instant, a thick wall of Mana protected the ship.

What’s more, it was oval shaped, and with the increase in the boat’s speed, we were able to slip the vessel out of its impact trajectory. The Mana mass that strayed from the ship hit the sea’s surface in the distance, and raised a large pillar of water.

Monica looked at it.

“Truly, one hit of that would have blown us away.”

I protruded my right hand out forward.

“Fire!!”

The cannons on the starboard side blew fire all at once, and I used the Select Skill.

I set my aim on the heads on both side, and adjusted their speed so they’d collide, but when they hit, I saw Tressy’s form let off a faint light.

Monica gave a level-headed analysis.

“It’s covering its body with that mysterious energy called Mana. Of that attack, a vast majority of it never reached the main body. Mine and your attacks had more an effect, Chicken dickwad. Looking closely, it does seem those heads do have wounds from our attacks.”

“I see. Then I’m glad we didn’t aim for the center one.”

Hearing that, I looked at Tressy. It was glaring at us with its red eyes, and the whirlpool had grown stronger still.

“If it’s grown serious, then so be it. Will it approach, or continue attacking at a distance…”

Monica spoke.

“It looked like it’s closing it. You have successfully angered the beast.”

I pulled the bow with a smile. I increased the number of arrows from before, and pointed it a little higher. As Tressy began to move, the arrows of light rained down on him. They exploded on impact, but that pale light protected him, and none of them did anything decisive.

There, he dived into the water.

Monica spoke.

“The whirlpool has ceased. It seems it has to stay still for it to occur.”

I gave orders to Vera-san.

“The whirlpool has stopped. Please go right into running from Tressy.”

『Don’t make it sound so easy! Ah, god! Port! Port!』

The boat slowly turned its course to the left, and with the speed we’d built up, Tressy was stuck chasing us.

“Now then, should we aim for when it surfaces?”

Me and Monica held up our bow and cannon, and I aimed at the water front, and fired an arrow. Immediately afterwards, I covered my ears, opened my mouth, and Monica fired the cannon.

Two pillars of water.

Tressy’s movements dulled, making some distance to the ship.

From the Jewel.

『Huh? Is it really just going to croak like this?』
『No, Tressy should be able to get more serious than that.』
『But what a tough one… aren’t we at a disadvantage here? Monica’s cannon has five rounds left.』
『But when it’s that big, it sure has some firepower. If you’re going to take it back, you’ll have to decide on a piece… in that case, the middle head does look appealing.』

Monica set the next shell, and Tressy's head… when a face other than the center surfaced, it began gathering pale blue light in its mouth.

Letting out a sigh, I quickly pulled the bow, and fired.

"The same trick again… and too slow!"

My arrow hit the lights in its mouth, causing it to explode, and inflict magic damage on itself. It fell back into the water, and its movements grew even duller. It seemed to be trying to get itself together underwater.

"Hahaha, give chase!"

On my words, Monica also…

"Understood."

She held up her cannon, and turned it towards the water. Setting her aim, she fired it off again.

The distance was getting too great, so I told Vera-san to drop our speed.

"Could you lower our speed?"

『Understood. More importantly, couldn't we just run away like this?』

"Eh?"

『Eh?』

To Vera-san, who'd chosen the option of running away, I…

"We can win, so don't sweat it. And wait, if I don't bring back something here, my financial situation will be thrown into quite a mess, so…"

There, Monica set the next shell, and addressed me.

"It seems you've really enraged it."

When I turned my eyes to Tressy, the center head showed itself from the water's surface, and bit at the other ones. It sunk its teeth

in, and tore off one of its flailing heads, and after some fighting with the other one, it tried to discard it as well.

“… Okay, fire.”

Tressy had waited for us. But we didn’t have to wait in return. He was making such a nice opening, so we were going to open it.

“I, Monica, love it when you’re so vicious, Chicken Dickwad. Let’s go right at it.”

“I also love you. I love you, Monica.”

“…! What was that!? Daaaamn!! I let it slide! Please say it again! Say it again with a refreshing smile!”

“Hahaha, you won’t get it from me so easily. Now then, on to the next shot. Once it’s done, I’ll give you as much love as you want. That goes for everyone!”

『Take this seriously!! You’re definitely an idiot! Hey!!』

I smiled at Shannon, as she shouted out in protest atop the deck. May was protecting her, and she was keeping her demon eyes locked on Tressy.

“But before I shower you with love, we’ll have to collect the materials and magic stones.”

“I-I must hurry! The clock is…! I must put an end to all this before the Chicken Dickwad’s Fever Time ends!”

As Tressy was fighting with the heads of its body, we mercilessly poured our attacks onto it.

21 - Trump Card

As Tressy tried to bite off its second head, me and Monica bombarded it with cannon shells, and arrows of light.

As the rain fell, the cannon rounds exploded, and as he let off a faint light, blood flowed out of the spot where his head once was, as he glared at us.

Monica had run out of armor piercing rounds, and she had used an explosive one. And she evaluated it.

“The explosive shells aren’t too effective.”

She left the cannon on the deck. From the heat it had been building up, the rain and seawater coming down on it raised a thick steam.

“It explodes flashily, just as I like it, but… it didn’t really do much.”

When I said that, Tressy’s glowing frame looked over all of us with its red eyes, before it turned to the heavens, and let out a roar. It plunged into the water with sharper movements than before, and began its approach.

I called to Vera-san.

“Crank the speed up all the way. It seems it’s gotten serious.”

The answer that came was…

『Why does relinquishing its own heads make it stronger!? I just have raise the speed, right? Right!?』

Monica took out a large hammer from under her apron, and took a stance.

“No wonder the development of firearms is so behind. The means they have to block it are too unfair. The hell’s up with those barriers.”

The one to agree with her complaint was the Seventh in the jewel.

『Exactly. Their firepower can be shaved down to such an extent, and they cost gold, so no one recognized them… they're definitely superior weapons, I tell you.』

They were definitely useful, but perhaps they weren't at a level where they'd become too wide-spread yet.

I pulled my bow, and sent off an arrow at the water.

It pierced into the water's surface, hit Tressy head-on, and raised an explosion. But his movements didn't dull as they had before.

"With three heads… it was difficult to move just one body. It's moving much better than before."

When I admired it, Shannon- held up by May- looked at Tressy's movements. She turned to me, and yelled out.

"Why do you look so happy!? Take it out before it gets serious!"

Her opinion was right on the mark. But I didn't defeat it before that, so there was no helping it.

"That's what I wanted to do, but it didn't work out. Well, I don't hate chipping away at it like that, but let's move on to the next means."

Monica was of the same opinion.

"By my calculations, your long distance attacks won't be able to defeat it. As for me, I only have one exploding shell left."

On those words, Shannon's eyes went teary.

"Y-you really can beat it, right!?"

I used my right hand to flip my wet hair.

"How foolish. If you lose, all that happens is that you die. What good comes out of thinking what comes after losing? I only ever think of winning alone. That's my way of life!"

Shannon held by May began thrashing about.

"When this is all over, I'm definitely smacking you!"

“Hey, don’t struggle around. I’m the only one you’re hurting, you know?”

I smiled.

“That’s the spirit! After we win, I’ll play with you all you want. Now then, there’s no elegance to be found in using nothing but a bow. Next, let’s have a go with this one.”

I changed the bow to the halberd, took a swing with it, and made a pose on the deck.

Right after that, Miranda sent a transmission from behind.

『Sorry for interrupting your fun, but it looks like it’ll catch u, you know? If it grabs the ships, won’t it drag us all straight down to the bottom of the ocean?』

I held the halberd in my right hand, and held my left hand high.

“No problem. The current me can take on a Tressy or two. All hands, I’m raising our speed, so please be careful… Up n’ Down.”

When I used a Skill, the ship’s speed suddenly rose, and Tressy’s movements dulled. But even with that, He was closing in on us.

By lopping off two heads, its movements had unified, making it quite troublesome.

I touched my left hand to my chin as I…

“So it was easiest to defeat while it still had three heads…”

There, I heard Clara’s voice.

『… For now, I’m thinking of making a record once this is over. Of course, it’s a monster I can’t really say will spawn again. And the results are in.』

With my Skill… Connection… linking us, information flowed into my head. What I had her look up was data pertaining to aquatic monsters.

What attacks they used, and what characteristics they shared…

From looking over monsters close to Tressy, I had her make some conjecture.

Anyways, most large monsters would try to pull boats down to the depths.

“So they’ll usually try to pull us in. Is Tressy set for that as well? And the other thing they’re skilled in is…”

When I thought, Novem called from the head of the ship. She sounded a little more impatient than usual.

『Lyle-sama, ice has manifested on the front. It’s quite big.』

I confirmed it through Novem’s visual input, And analyzing it even faster than me, Vera-san reacted.

『P-port! Everyone grab onto something!』

The ship suddenly swerved, avoiding the mountain of ice that had formed. But with our course changed, Tressy was going to catch up.

Jumping out of the water, as if to cover up the swerving ship, Tressy seemed to be trying to hit his belly down on us, and sink us.

But…

“You’re timing it a little off, Tressy.”

I laughed, jumped up, and stuck my halberd into the scale-less part of his stomach.

When I swung my weapon, I felt some harsh resistance before it could touch his stomach. But I went ahead, took a swing, and inflicted a wound a few meters across.

The blood didn’t splash onto me, but at the same time, I could tell by instinct I wouldn’t be able to win like this.

When I landed, I was just barely at the back of the ship.

Miranda looked at me.

“As always, you do some dangerous things… and wait, I do get the

feeling it's simply too large to defeat."

After trying to cover us, Tressy passed over the boat, and I could see him raise a large splash of water behind us.

Looking at my halberd, I confirmed it wasn't chipped before looking at the water face Tressy had dived into.

Miranda looked at me.

"You did cut it, right?"

I shook my head.

"I thought it would work out with its stomach, but it was protected with Mana. I did make a cut, but… it was too shallow."

Looking at Tressy's giant body, the cut I made was but a scratch.

I returned it to its Jewel form, hung it at my neck and used a Skill… Box. From the treasure chest that came out, I took out a sabre.

"Hey, if your silver weapons don't work, what are you trying to do with a sabre?"

To Miranda's doubtful look, I…

"These are for the other monsters. It seems they've gathered up."

Miranda noticed, and looked around. A flock of Sahuagins had gathered around the ship. To be more specific, a group of Sahuagins was attacking the ship.

That was really the only route she could choose, so I couldn't blame Vera-san for it.

She issued out orders.

『Everyone take up your weapons! Prevent them from infiltrating the bridge! You don't have to go out on the deck!』

Six sabres at my hips. An extra one in each hand. Holding eight sabres, I took a horizontal swing at a Sahuagin that'd leapt out of that water.

Miranda also took out her knife, and threw it at another one that had popped out.

“Looks like its head’s turning better after taking a bite out of itself.”

Having blocked our initial path, sending us into a flock of monsters, Tressy leisurely showed itself from the water, and opened its large mouth.

It wasn’t a lump of Mana this time, it gathered up the surrounding sea water, and began to compress it.

I.

“Novem!”

I shouted out Novem’s name, and she created a few walls of ice in front of the beast.

Immediately after, it shot out pressurized water, and easily pierced through those walls. Vera-san called out.

『Starboard!』

The ship was able to avoid the liquid stream. Taking down the walls of ice on its way, Tressy swam our way. As I cut down one of the approaching Sahuaggin, I issued orders.

『May, how are things on your side?』

『All green. To add on to that, Monica’s come to assist.』

In the center of the deck, positioned to protect Shannon and Novem, May and Monica fought off monsters.

They continued coming out one after another at the aft, and breaking down the doors, they started infiltrating the ship’s insides.

Miranda created threads from the fingers of both her hands, restraining the surrounding Sahuagins, and tearing them apart.

“That’s quite a convenient one.”

When I said that, Miranda spoke.

“It really is. It’s got a nice cutting edge, you can tie things up, and based on how you use it…”

The threads wrapped around some more Sahuagins. And as they writhed in pain, their heads were all cleanly severed at once.

From the Jewel, I could heard the Fifth’s voice.

『… A spider-like woman, she is.』

I thought the same.

“You’re like a spider, Miranda.”

Giving a smile, Miranda continued to take on the surroundings monsters, as she…

“That so? Want to be caught in my threads?”

Said that.

“You better tie me tight so I don’t get away. No, we’re talking about spiders, so… whatever. I welcome it! Use your threads to bind me as you wish!”

Miranda laughed a little.

“I see. Then without further ado… and everyone is listening to our conversation, you know?”

“Is that a problem?”

When I replied with a straight face, Miranda seemed to be enjoying herself.

“Very well, I’ll refrain from teasing you over this conversation when you turn back. Make sure you shower me with love, even when you’re sane, Lyle.”

“Any time you want!”

As I continued cutting down the Sahuagins gathering around, the sabres in my hand began to become blood-stained, and chipped.

“Time to switch.”

I stabbed both of them into the monster in front of me, parted my hands from them, and kicked the enemy away.

Drawing new sabres from my hips, I spun as I cut at the Sahuagins trying to thrust their harpoons at my sides.

Aria let out her voice.

『You over there! Quite flirting in the middle of battle! The Sahuagins are getting all the way in here, and… get out da way!!』

They had gotten all the way to Aria, and she impaled them to death, one by one.

From her visual input, I could see the sailors around her were drawing back. Her tomboyish side was cute, but…

“What, are you sulking, Aria? I love your wild side too!”

When I said that with a smile, Vera-san spoke.

『Hey, shut up, all of you! Ah, just talking to myself there. Men, you need not force yourselves to fight, just bar down the room’s entrance! Take care of them later, and concentrate on Tressy for now! … No! It’s Trident Serpent, dammit!』

She seemed confused, and our conversation was being mixed in with the one she was having at the bridge.

“What’s wrong with Tressy?”

I thought it was a cute name, but Vera-san didn’t seem to have taken a liking to it. She shouted out various orders at the bridge, and make good use of the sailors.

From Eva…

『… It’s hot. What’s more, there are Sahuagins at the door… I’m dripping with sweat, and my clothes are…』

Clara…

『Everything’s fine over here. They’ve got the guns together. They sure are convenient. Perhaps I should get one myself…』

She seemed to be showing interest in the guns.

And there, Monica…

『Chicken Dickwad. The Sahuagins have begun grappling with the bridge. If that point is captured, there is nothing we can do.』

On top of that, Novem…

『Tressy is coming to sink us for real. What shall we do, Lyle-sama?』

The bridge was in a tight spot, while Tressy was just about to attack the ship.

“Isn’t is obvious? Take care of both of them, and there’s no problem!”

And like that, I threw my sabres at the monsters, and pulled out number five and six. And my eyes turned to the cannon Monica had left on deck.

❼

… At the bridge, a battle was raging on with the Sahuagins that had wrenched open the door.

“Kuh!”

Vera pulled her handgun from her back holster, and fired it at the door.

The captain took a gun left around in his hand.

“Milady, please stand down!”

Within the swaying ship, Vera was also putting up a desperate fight for the bridge.

“Hey, what are you doing, getting up! While I’m holding them back, you’re to properly steer the ship!”

Opening up her revolver’s cylinder, she swapped out her bullets. But as her concentration turned to the approaching Tressy, her shot

ended up missing.

(Damn! I don't have much ammo left…)

On her shot, two Sahuagins had fled from the door, and the remaining one was drawing closer. With her last shot, she managed to blow half its head off, but it continued to take a step inside.

The captain was also delayed with reloading his gun. The boat's rocking had grown violent, and Tressy was coming closer by the second.

Vera wasn't the only one in a panic.

"You… get out already!"

Letting her angel wing hair sway, she kicked the Sahuagin with her boot. There, it flew out the door with good momentum, and…

"Shit!"

By the time Vera had noticed it, the ship had already taken a large lurch. Having launched a kick at the door, her momentum threw her outside of it…

Opening its large mouth, Tressy immediately surfaced below her.

Vera looked down at the beast.

(I see, so it ends here.)

As her surroundings seemed to move strangely slow, Vera extended her hands towards the ship, as she flew through the air.

Even when the captain and sailors at the bridge wouldn't be able to reach, she reached out her hands. They were shouting something out, but Vera couldn't hear.

And as she saw her own hands held out, the scene overlapped more and more with the dream she saw again and again.

(Was it a prophetic dream after all…)

Not wanting to fall into the ocean, extending her hands. But was the

figure of her own form crumbling away a forecast of her death? That's what Vera thought.

(I see, so it really ends here… I really should've conveyed my feelings properly.)

As she slowly approached the mouth that was to swallow her, Vera closed her eyes, and waited…

"Hey could you cover your ears, and open your mouth for me?"

Gripping her extended hands, she opened her eyes to find Lyle in the air beside her, with a large cannon in his hands.

Hoisting her next to him, she came into the embrace of his form, soaked in blood spurt, sea water, and rain.

Lyle raised a laugh.

"If the outside's no good, then how about inside… if you can endure this one, I'll show you my trump card, oh God of the Seas."

"Y-you're… laughing."

"Hey, cover your ears."

Vera put her gun in its holster, covered her ears, and opened her mouth. At that moment, Lyle pulled the trigger part. He was opening his mouth, and he had earplugs on.

As the impact rung out, Tressy closed its mouth on both of them…

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… Novem saw Lyle swallowed up by Tressy's mouth.

She didn't find it anything to grieve over. He had jumped in of his own accord, with Monica's cannon in hand, after all. And after Tressy closed its mouth, its large body bent back, and its head pointed up at the heavens.

The area from its neck down to its stomach suddenly expanded, and its mouth reeled open.

From inside, with the cannon in his left hand… and Vera held in his left, Lyle was spit out.

"Lyle-sama!"

She saw the figure of the boy using a body strengthening Skill… what's more the long-lost Third Stage of the Walt House Founder's Skill.

From Lyle's Connection Skill, the information of what Skills he was using entered her head.

Just how had Lyle revived that lost Skill… Novem did question it, but at the moment, the enemy before her eyes was in the way.

She changed the shape of the staff in her hands, formed a large scythe, and cut apart the Sahuagins around her.

"Step back. I won't let you do as you like any longer."

A faint light in her violet eyes, Novem muttered.

"Now burn."

It wasn't an incantation of any kind. With the force behind her simple words, Novem controlled her magic, and caused flames to spring forth. The bodies of the Sahuagins around her were lit with that pale-blue blaze, and they began to burn away.

While the rain and sea spray wouldn't put that fire out, it didn't even singe the deck.

Once she had secured a safe place for Lyle to land, Novem turned her eyes to Tressy. It had stopped its attacks, slowly falling back into the water, and raising a splash.

But it hadn't been defeated yet.

"Not enough yet."

She gripped her staff, and got in a stance to cast magic when Lyle landed on the deck.

He tossed the cannon aside, and the water splashing onto its barrel let off a white steam.

Carefully lowering Vera onto the deck, Lyle put his hands to his ears.

"I had forgot to put them on, but they sure came in handy."

Blowing away the Sahuagins in her path, Monica approached him.

"My thoughts exactly. How useless a chicken must you be, to forget to wear them. Though that part of you is cute as well."

As Lyle pulled a sabre…

"Call it cool!"

… He bisected an approaching monster.

At that moment, Shannon's voice entered their heads. Looking her way, she was being carried under May's arm. May kicked away the Sahuagins drawing closer, and fired off lightning to char them black.

『How is forgetting to wear earplugs supposed to be cool… just do whatever you want. I don't care anymore.』

She let her body hang limp, but she was still using her Demon Eyes to take in Tressy, and the flow of Mana around it.

While thinking over how she was a large contribution this time around, Novem turned to the spot where Tressy was surfacing

again.

It had somehow survived, but its insides were more damaged than its appearance. Looking at Lyle, it let out a roar, but the intensity of its voice was waning.

From the bridge, the captain worried for Vera's well-being.

"Milaaaadddyyy!!"

Vera slowly stood, as she spoke.

"Seriously, just steer the ship already! If we sink here, there's no point at all!"

Seeing a strong will in the girl's eyes, to show she had yet to give in, Novem nodded in satisfaction.

Lyle pointed his sabre at Tressy.

"Port cannons, all at once!"

Reacting to his voice, the cannons on the ship's left blew fire. As they hit Tressy's body head-on, and perhaps its resistance had become weak, as the monster spat up blood as they pounded into its surface.

Seeing that, Lyle…

"It's still too hard, I see…"

Lyle tossed the sabres in both his hands to take out two Sahuagins, before reaching his hand towards the Jewel.

"You've toughed it out splendidly. As a reward… I'll show you my trump card."

Saying that, Lyle Clenched the Jewel, and pulled it down as if to snap the chain, causing the giant silver sword Novem had seen before to appear in his hands.

The shape of the sword was truly barbaric. But while it was a crude weapon to cut enemies down, perhaps because it had been formed from the Jewel's silver craftsmanship, it was adorned with brautiful

ornaments of its own.

Novem's side ponytail swinging in the wind rose to block her vision, so she undid it with one hand.

And…

"Basil-sama's form… It's not just a resemblance."

The father of the Provincial noble Walt House of her memories. Novem could feel the First Generation, 【Basil Walt】's figure from Lyle.

The shape of his sword was reminiscent, and she felt it wasn't just a similarity from carrying his ancestor's blood.

"As I thought…"

Tressy wrung out the last of its power to attack the Ship. Rather than that, it tried to ram its head onto Lyle, who was on the deck of the ship

With its body hit against it, the boat's movements stopped, and as the boat took a great lurch, it inclined to a level where it was impossible for anyone to remain standing.

Within that, Monica and Novem were the only ones to maintain their postures, and both were watching Lyle.

"This one's really the most troubling one. Does it take after its wielder? The more you try to do with it, the more magic it sucks up from you. So it's hard to use for long periods of time. And rejoice… the current me… the me who's experienced a Growth can use it better now, than ever before!"

Lyle dashed up the tilting deck, running right at Tressy's head as if to challenge it head-on.

The silver sword let off a pale glow, leaving a faint tail of light behind him.

Tressy opened its large mouth to swallow Lyle up, and Lyle went right ahead, and rushed into that mouth.

And this time, before it could close its mouth, a pale line of light was traced across Tressy's body. A few more lines emerged, and around the partition of neck and body… There the heads had once branched off, its neck was cleanly severed, and Lyle jumped out.

The blade-like spikes of Tressy's crown pierced into the deck as it fell off, and the separated body portion slowly drew a line of blood down the ship's side as it slipped down into the water.

But by the weight of the main head sticking into the deck, even as it corrected itself, the ship began to lurch the other direction.

"At this rate, we'll capsize. I must freeze the…"

Freeze the water surface.

It was at the moment.

The water froze over before Novem could move, and as if being supported up, the Boat came to a stop. She didn't think the enemy was still alive, but Novem moved to look at the frozen sea.

Tressy's severed head on the deck opened its eyes wide as it watched Novem pass by.

Novem muttered a soft, 'you can rest now,' as she passed, and Tressy slowly began to close its eyes.

Gather at the side to look at the ice, Vera and the sailors. And everyone who'd come out on deck was sending their eyes that way.

Holding up Shannon, May looked atop the ice.

"Whales… this late in the game."

Whales of large build, and smaller ones as well were gathering. Around the ice, they were assembling in great numbers.

Novem watched over them. She looked at the largest white whale among them.

"There's even a white whale."

The white whale approached the ice, and took on human form. The

form of one barely wearing anything, with only the important parts covered.

In one hand, a golden spear, and a tiara on her head. The woman of massive build stood on the ice, and looked up at the boat.

With eyes the same sea-blue as her hair, she looked at Tressy.

“When we finally gathered to take care of you, you’ve already fallen by human hands… no, there’s a quilin there too.”

The womanly divine beast first looked at Tressy’s head stuck in the deck, then at May, and finally at the other heads peeking out of the ship.

And once she looked at Novem, she stopped.

“… I see. So it’s not that you ventured here, but that you were called. No, perhaps they did not have such intentions… hmm…”

Her eyes then went to Vera. There, the girl burst out laughing.

“Ahahaha, that’s just perfect. But it’s all beat up, is it not? I’ll make it so it doesn’t sink for a while. And send down a representative, won’t you?”

On those words, Novem turned around.

Looking over Tressy’s head, Lyle and Monica…

“Representative… that would be me!”

“I do love that overconfidence, but thinking normally, that should be Vera Trēs-sama. Still, just how much do you think this will sell for?”

“… That can’t be! Could it be they mean to take Tressy’s crown from me!? This is mine! I’m not going to let some jane doe come and steal it up! I’m going to go complain.”

Jumping down from that disorderly deck, Lyle landed on the ice.

But…

“Ah, Lyle-sama…”

Novem extended her hand, and Vera held her left hand to her face.

“He slipped.”

As Lyle made a magnificent tumble upon hitting the ground, the divine beast looked over him with a blank expression…

❼

“Hahaha, I never thought you’d come down to meet me, and slip on the way. You’re an interesting human.”

“I know right? I don’t mind if you fall for me.”

“I’ll have to decline. I’m still quite faithful to my late husband. Still, I’m surprised you managed to defeat that one. Let me hear your name.”

Saying that, the woman whose hair extended all the way to the ice put her golden spear over her shoulder, and lent a hand to help me up.

I do think I’ve made falling into an art form.

From within the Jewel, the Fifth was…

『You, why do you have to slip up at a place like… no, it was marvelous, I tell you. It really was the best, considering the time!』

He sounded delighted.

I gripped the woman’s hand, and stood before spreading out both my arms.

“Lyle Walt… the man who took down the one called the God of the Seas. If you had come but a moment sooner, I’m sure you’d have fallen for me.”

There the woman tilted her head.

“What? That’s how it’s gotten to be called? One or two hundred years ago, it was treated as a normal monster… and my husband was a human of three hundred years passed. You had yet to be

born, child… but Walt, was it? I had heard there was a hero of the land who went by that name.”

Reacting to those words, the Third in the Jewel.

『Lyle, confirm it… Who that Walt is supposed to be.』

Divine beasts were long lived. And it’s quite often their memories are hazy. From the start, they didn’t live in human society, so they often didn’t have interest in the finer details.

“Someone who bore my surname three hundred years ago? Could I ask their name?”

The woman tapped her spear against her shoulder, as she thought a bit.

“I can’t remember. The name Walt does remain in my memory. I think the other one was Forxuz? There was Bahn… something or another, as well. My husband did live on the land, but it’s the happenings of three hundred years ago. Oh, you’ve retrieved it?”

One of the whales brought a large red stone on top of its head. The woman picked the large item up in one hand, and tossed it over to me.

When I accepted it, I found that even for me, it was heavy enough to need the support of my Skills to lift in one hand.

The woman looked at me.

“… I thought I would put you through a spot of pain for trying to seduce me, but it looks like you do have what it takes in you to defeat that one.”

“What, you were angry? Worry not. I don’t have a hobby of going after someone’s woman.”

The woman looked a little fed up, but she was also smiling.

“You really are an interesting human. You wanted the magic stone, didn’t you? It was sinking to the ocean’s depths, so we went ahead and retrieved it. Its purity is high, so I’m sure it’ll sell for quite an

amount. Now then, this ice will hold up a while. It'll probably melt by the time you do something about that head sticking out of your ship, though."

I looked at the large Magic Stone in my hand. I hadn't seen one of this size since the fortieth floor's boss… since Arumsaas.

The Fourth called out.

『… So in the end, we won't learn which Walt. It's bothering me quite a bit.』

And as the woman turned to return to the sea, she gave some parting words.

"Ah, but if you really want to know, just look it up in a book. It was quite a famous tale at the time, so I'm sure you can at least find the name. I mean, they're the ones who fought and defeated the beautiful vixen… who fought to defeat Agrissa. I'm none too knowledgeable, but it was really famous back then."

Hearing that name, I held up my left hand.

"Wait a sec…"

But right after, I saw the large white tail of a whale raise up high, as she dived deep into the sea.

❼

The rainclouds parted, and the sea was died a shade of orange.

From the disassembled head of Tressy… I took the crown, and put it away in the Seventh's box.

"We're rich! We're rich!"

When I was shouting out in joy, Shannon looked at me with a worn-out expression.

"Shut it, idiot! How many times do you think I've almost died because of you!?"

I looked at Shannon, and took a guess at the reason she was angry at me.

“What, so you wanted me to shower you with love? Come to me, I’ll do it now. You don’t have to be so angry.”

The Seventh held back some laughter, as he spoke.

『W-wro… I don’t think that’s the case, Lyle.』

The happy ancestors were a bit doubtful this time. They were better behaved than usual, and it was extremely boring.

Shannon shouted.

“Don’t screw with me! Sweet-talking each and every one of them, you think everything you’ve done will just be overlooked!? Don’t think everyone is so easy, idiot Lyle!”

I suppressed a laugh.

“It’s best you don’t deny it so strongly. You’re looking unnecessarily easier, Shaneasy.”

There, she snapped, began flailing her arms about, and commenced her attack. I used my left hand to hold her head back.

“Who the hell is Shaneasy, dammit!”

“Oh, my apologies… you were acting so cute, I couldn’t help but tease you. You’re cute, Shannon.”

“Why are you… you bastard!”

As Shannon needlessly flailed around, the ones atop the deck smiled and watched, and there, Vera-san came out.

“We’ve finished dealing with the Sahuagins that infiltrated the ship. We’ve also done the temporary repairs. We’re going to depart, but are there any problems?”

There, Aria responded.

“Ah, no problems on our side, so do whatever you want. And it’s

about the reward, but… since you cancelled it…”

Vera-san shook her head.

“You did your job splendidly. To such an extent I’d give a bonus from my own pocket. Well then, we’re off.”

Taking my hand from Shannon, I approached Vera-san with a serious face.

“No, there’s still an important matter to take care of.”

“W-what is it? And wait, why are you so serious…”

I came closer, as she took some distance, took her hand, and pulled her closer.

“That last kiss was a necessity, and didn’t count to anything. Give me your first kiss. Become mine, Vera.”

Vera-san’s face stiffened, and the surroundings Sailors looking on…

“He fearlessly talked with the divine beast, so he’s got some guts.”
“No, but for the Lady, it’ll have to be a man of at least his caliber.”
“But that would make him the heir, wouldn’t it? No, is that really alright?”

They were relatively affirmative. It seems they’ve finally noticed my worth.

“Now, could I hear your answer?”

I could hear some fed-up voices around.

Having changed out of her sweaty clothes, Eva looked at me.

“… He’s boldly doing it in front of all of us…”

I grandly turned to her, and pointed my thumb at myself.

“It’s not my taste to beat around the bush with love!”

When I said that, the Third burst into laughter.

『No, I think you’re mistaking the premise, mr. lyle!! Before the girls,

you can’t just confess to other women!』

The Fourth was the same. His voice sounded as if he was holding his stomach, and laughing.

『Even when you can’t even confess in your normal state!』

Making a wry smile, Novem didn’t say anything to my opinion. Meaning even from Novem’s eyes, she was a passing candidate.

(There’s no fault in my eyes. Vera is a woman worthy of me!)

Distancing herself from me, Vera-san crossed her arms, and struck a daunting pose.

“Very well. After you’ve done so much, I won’t mind considering it. But… let’s have a match.”

“Match? Even if I may lose for the sake of victory, I, Lyle am a man who shall always win in the end. Will you still take me on, knowing that?”

When I flipped my hair and said that, Vera laughed, and gave an order to one of the sailors.

“We had that strong ale and those glasses with us, didn’t we? Could you bring them over?”

The sailors…

“Ah~ that one… but I don’t think boss Lyle knows about it.”

“That’s precisely why it’s a match. Hurry up and bring it.”

Before I knew it, the sailors were already calling me their boss.

“Now then, what should I do about the match…”

❼

On top of the deck that had undergone temporary repairs, with an illuminated table between us, I stood across from Vera.

On it was a wine glass that looked like a large, round plate, with a sturdy foundation under it. It was a glass I'd not seen much of in Bahnseim, so it was probably an article from some foreign land.

Vera had prepared that cup, and a cask.

"If you can drink down one hundred full cups, I don't mind loving you. Well, even even if you fail, I'll pay the reward, so don't worry too much."

The surrounding crew members were looking at me, and Novem and the others seemed worried.

The cask contained some high-proof ale, and each glass contained quite an amount.

There, the Fourth spoke interestedly.

『Yeah, this is that… she's not a dull one. If you think about it, one hundred of those is impossible. Push yourself, and you'll ruin your body.』

The Seventh as well.

『… This girl is testing Lyle. Now then, how about we bring an end to it. I don't want to damage Lyle. Lyle, try flipping over the cup.』

If you flipped the cup over, the small indent in its foundation would only hold a small bit of drink.

Vera's eyes narrowed, and the surrounding sailors whistled.

"So he knew about them?"
"Well, think over it a bit, and you'll notice, I guess."
"Does this mean the lady's marriage's been decided?"

Vera let out a light sigh.

"I see it's my loss."

But I…

"What are you talking about!? I've yet to drink a hundred glasses. Say it as you watch me drink down your drink. I'm sure it'll be a

blast.”

Saying that, I opened the tap, and filled the cup’s small crevice to the top. Bringing the small bit of ale to my mouth, I…

“Ofwooh…”

Collapsed.

“… Eh?”

Vera was making an expression of shock. Novem rushed over to me.

“Lyle-sama, come to think of it, up to now, have you ever drunken ale before…”

Miranda looked at me.

“… He hasn’t. He always ordered water or tea.”

Aria hit her hand to her forehead.

“There’s really no helping you, is there…”

Clara.

“… It’s nice that you noticed it and all. But no matter how you look at it, you failed.”

Eva touched her hand to her mouth, and laughed.

“You’re weak to alcohol? That’s kinda cute.”

May looked over me.

“Your face is bright red. After talking so big, for you to lose…”

Monica immediately prepared water, and had me drink it.

“Even if you’re useless against ale, the Chicken Dickwad is my precious master. Now wake up, and shower me with your love. I guarantee I’ll store it in my databanks for all eternity.”

And finally, Shannon pointed at me.

“How uncool!”

She said, as she laughed to herself. The ancestors as well.

『So that's the end of it? What? His Fever Time ends here?』
『Quite a bit came out this time. Personally, perhaps it's 'It's not my taste to beat around the bush with love!' for me?』
『Isn't it, 'I'm confident I can get even a goddess to fall for me'?』
『His landing malfunction in front of the divine beast wasn't bad either. Fifth, you didn't react too much to the divine beasts this time, did you.』

On the Seventh's question, the Fifth.

『When they're that big, it's not even a question of whether they're cute or not. I can't dote on them properly when they're even larger than the ship.』

I heard a voice like that.

(T-this can't be… this is only a step on the road to victo…)

14 - mr. lyle Reads Ahead

The sun having set, it was night atop the sea.

I was carried to a bed, where I lay and rested up.

A towel was placed on my forehead, and it was pleasantly cool. It was a miscalculation for my face to turn red after merely touching alcohol to my mouth, but I accomplished my objective, so there weren't any problems. I was about to go to sleep.

There, a knock came at the door. When I replied, the one to enter was Vera.

"What, as I thought, you've decided to accept my confession?"

When I said that, she spoke with a fed-up expression.

"Just how optimistic can you be? Just go to sleep already. I only came to say my personal thanks. And I cannot answer to your feelings. I have someone I like."

When I slowly raised my body, Vera drew closer to pick up the towel that'd fallen from my forehead.

She reached her hand, so I grabbed it, and pulled her towards me. Looking at her, as she narrowed her eyes and reach a hand to her back hip, I…

"Then that's unfortunate. But if that's the case, you'd best be careful."

"… What do you mean by that?"

I continued pulling her in, lay her down on the bed, and circled around to a position to pin her down. Our positions had been reversed.

I hung over Vera.

There, a golden gunpoint was thrust into my stomach.

“… I can’t laugh at this one. Please don’t make me shoot my life’s savior.”

I smiled, and brought the gun’s barrel up to my heart.

“If you’re going to aim, try aiming here. And your gun isn’t loaded.”

When I said that, she looked annoyed. She averted her face, and…

“I’m sure you’re just after my fortune. You did say something about your finances after all… I’m sorry, but could you go knocking elsewhere? It’s not like I’m going to succeed the Trēs house. How unfortunate for you.”

Hearing that, I…

“I see… so the love you have is unrequited? Or your statuses don’t match. The former, I see.”

Seeing Vera had reacted to the unrequited love portion, I traced her collarbone with my finger.

“I do want money. I also want your connections. There are various things I want, but… I’m starting to want your body and heart as well.”

“Are you drunk? I’m sure your spirits are high from your Growth, but this’ll become something awful later on.”

As she resisted with a reddened face, I continued pressing her down, and laughed.

“Got it. Then how about a match?”

“Again? You really don’t learn.”

While listening to her breathing get rough, I spoke.

“The contract is until this boat returns to Beim. We’re going to stay a few weeks at the port, aren’t we?”

“… We have to do proper repairs, so that period may stretch out. What of it?”

I directed a smile at her.

“I won’t do a thing. But if you admit your defeat by the time we get to Beim… then kiss me. Be careful. Try not to think of me. Keep me on your mind, and you’ll fall in love.”

“… I’m sure tomorrow will be a spectacle. You needn’t worry about it, I will never fall in love with you.”

I got off of the bed, and lent Vera a hand to get up. She moved straight to leave the room, going through the door with her hand pressed to her chest.

As she passed me by…

“It’s because I’m in your debt, that I’ve overlooked this much. Don’t misunderstand me. But I am thankful for today.”

Saying that, she closed the door.

From the Jewel hung at my neck, the Seventh let his voice.

『Looks like this time was a failure, mr. lyle.』

In the empty room, I confirmed my victory.

“I’ve already said it. In order to win in the end, I’ll accept some defeat. What, I need only wait for her to fall. Even if I won her challenge, the girl herself wouldn’t have fully accepted it. More than that, because she’d lost, she’d only reluctantly follow along. It would take much more time for her to truly fall. This was for the best.”

The Fourth laughed.

『Those could also come off as the words of a sore loser. But good work this time. Rather than interesting, how should I put this… I’ve been able to evaluate your offense more than usual.』

The Fifth shared his sentiment, but he sounded a little worried.

『He’s more assertive than the usual Lyle, but he’s too assertive. This time was a case where we couldn’t run away, but when it’s possible, we should keep retreat in our field of vision. We were able to put his Growth to good use this time.』

The Seventh was mindful of the whale's… White Whale's words.

『Personally, I'm curious about the white whale's words. A Walt House three hundred years ago. Do you think they're related to us?』

The Third thought a little.

『… I can't be certain they're not. The information of how Aggrissa was defeated is unusual, and scarce. And it's a country that wouldn't hesitate to perpetrate this and that, so it's possible something went on in its rise. Even so, mr. lyle sure is horrible. Don't think about me… saying something like that only gets people to think about you more.』

On top of that, we handed over the Magic Stone.

And this time around, I obtained Tressy's head. Scales and fangs, as well as a large quantity of metal. After all they'd done to assist, we had to at least give them the Magic Stone. But when I said all I'd take was Tressy's head, I found Vera's apologetic face a bit curious.

A number of times, she asked, 'are you fine with that?' and I'm certain it wasn't just that she wanted to give us a larger share… she was earnestly worried for us.

I lay on the bed, and closed my eyes.

"Well, when we return, I'll try looking into this and that. And… by the time we reach Beim, Vera will have fallen for me."

On my words, the Fourth spoke.

『What overconfidence… I can't help but wait for tomorrow.』

The Fifth, quietly…

『If it were me, perhaps I would throw myself into the sea.』

❼

… The second morning after Tressy's attack.

Vera was talking with the captain at the bridge. The reason their bodies felt light, and they felt they wouldn't lose to anyone in the world was surely because they had gone through Growths themselves.

Of course, having seen Lyle, they bore it in mind to contain themselves.

"We really will be late."

"We did stray off course, and we've wasted two whole days. But I never imagined a growth would come at this old age… good grief, I'd like to forget the events of yesterday."

Having defeated Tressy, the ship's sailors showed an inclination towards Growth. It wasn't to Lyle's level, but even Vera didn't feel like doing anything for two whole days.

At present, she was feeling an uplifting sensation, but she kept it in mind not to lose rational thought.

With the strange elation surrounding the crew the day before, they determined it would be dangerous to advance the ship, and kept its movement to a minimum as they rested.

Cleaning and repairing cut away some time, and because of all that, it didn't look as if they'd make it to the port on time.

"It would really help if the boss left his room. That speed-increasing Skill, right? You think we could get him to use it?"

When Vera heard Lyle's name, she grinned in delight.

"It doesn't look like he'll ever come out. He was in quite a terrible state, after all."

The Captain looked at her.

"Milady, you're not really one to speak. You've gone around to his place a number of times…"

"I only repaid the favor for that kiss of his. You think it petty? That was my first kiss, you know."

“You’ve got a point.”

The captain laughed, but remembering the situation it happened in, he pulled his hat down over his head.

“At this rate, we won’t be at a deficit, but it will become a problem of credibility.”

Vera heard that, and let out a sigh.

“You’re right… I guess I’ll try going and asking him again.”

The captain looked at Vera’s smiling profile, pretended to correct the position of his hat, and spoke in a small voice.

“You’re not honest with yourself.”

He said that…

❼

“Stop! Please stop! Don’t you dare call me mr. lyle!”

In the room I’d been given, I draped a cover over myself, and covered my ears.

“Boss, please come out.”
“Mr. Lyle, we’re beggin’ you here.”
“The ship will be late. At least hear us out, Mr. Lyle.”

It’s fine and all that the sailors had become friendly. But they began to call me boss and mr. lyle.

I’d like it they stopped. The reason being…

『Oy, oy, what happened to the mr. lyle of three days ago? You could at least go out, and use a Skill.』

『You can make even a goddess fall for you, can’t you? Maybe Vera-chan is already smitten? Go and check out the result.』

At the Third and Fourth’s bursts of laughed, I screamed under the covers.

“Don’t screw with me! I’m definitely not going outside! Definitely!”

And next, Novem and co. came to the door.

“Lyle-sama, it’s time for your meal, so please come out. You haven’t eaten anything for the past few days, right?”

Miranda sounded delightful.

“Yeah, come out already, and shower me with love. It was a promise, wasn’t it? I’ll draw it out slow and easy.”

Aria gave the door a strong knock.

“Just how long are you going to mope around!? You’ll grow mold! Get out already. And give us some fiery confessions as well!”

Shannon, as if seeking help from me.

“Hurry and get out of there! It’s scary! Everyone’s so high-strung that it’s scary!”

Eva sounded exhausted.

“It’s enervating for us to deal with them by ourselves. Hurry up, get out, and switch with us.”

In regards to her, Clara…

“You’ll make a sacrifice of Lyle-san? As expected of an elf. You’re good at using dirty means.”

May spoke from the other side of the door.

“Clara’s the one that changes the most, it seems. She’s been like this since morning.”

I could tell Clara was quite lively over there.

“Lyle-san, locking yourself in there forever won’t resolve anything. Now come outside, and let us tease you. It’s boring with nothing but women. The evil red-faced spider-woman and amazon are a bore, so please accompany me.”

“… Oy, who’s the amazon supposed to be?”

Aria was pressing Clara on the other side of the door.

“Why I’m talking about the woman who got herself soaked in Sahuagin blood, and caused all the ship’s men to draw back. Look for a mirror, and I’m sure you’ll meet her.”

I could hear Shannon’s scream.

“The sailors ran awaaay! Hey, onee-sama’s pulling a dagger from… hurry and get out here, idiot Lyle!”

Wrapping the blanket around, I yelled.

“Don’t want to! As if I’d ever go out there! Leave me be until we reach port!”

There, the locked door slowly opened.

It was Monica.

“How long will you grumble… I do find such a Chicken Dickwad wonderful as well, but you didn’t shower me with love in your Fever Time. I regret that over all else. Putting my expectations off to next time, it’s time to eat. Let me wipe down your body.”

The door opened, and Shannon burst in.

“Get up already! Do something about those women!”

When Shannon forcibly tried to pull me out, a hand rested atop her head. It was Miranda’s hand. Miranda was gripping her head.

“Shannon… would I be included in ‘those women’? When I think you’re looking on me like that, it saddens me. You sister is crying, so won’t you let her use you as bait to fish up a catch?”

Her head creaking out, she raised a scream of pain and fear.

“HIGYAAAAAAH!!”

Novem brought over my meal, and offered me a smile.

“You haven’t eaten anything for several days, right? Now eat.”

Clara entered the room, and looked at me.

“You’re making quite a face, Lyle-san. Could you talk about what happened? Is it still on your mind how you confessed to Vera-san in your post-Growth high tensions? Or could it be you’re sorrowful over how your confession failed? Which is it?”

Seeing her persistently press me with a smile, I retreated into the cover with teary eyes.

Eva…

“How you challenged the Trident Serpent, and saved the merchant daughter was cool, but… why must you run away after coming this far? That’s no end to a story. I’m cutting it from the song.”

As Eva said something like that, Clara gave a stronger rebuttal than usual.

“That’s why elves are no good. There’s no point in the truth unless it’s recorded in detail! I’ll record it all. Because I remember it. I was connected with Connection, so mr. lyle’s speech and action; I’ll record it all!”

I shouted.

“Please forget it! And what do you mean you’ll leave records!? You mean to say I’ll be laughed at for the rest of my life!? Isn’t it fine if you just cut all the strange parts!? Such records do nothing but torture me!”

May was looking at the meal Novem had brought in for me, while Monica had brought a change, and was waiting on standby. As the narrow room descended into chaos, Aria informed me I had a visitor.

“Lyle, guest for you. Look, you’ve got to properly confront her. She’s the girl you confessed to. Ah~ I’d like a confession that passionate someday.”

As she sent some expectant eyes, I thought in irritation.

(Don’t look at me like that!)

I complained in my heart, as I looked at Vera-san in the doorway.

“… Is something the matter?”

She thought a little, and let out a sigh.

“Now that I’ve seen you like that, I can’t really tease you. Well, your tension was high from your Growth, is how I’ll write it off, so come out and assist us. I’ll pay for it.”

For now, I wanted to escape from this chaos, so I stood with the blanket still around me, and decided to follow Vera-san.

—

❼

At the head of the ship, I lay with a blanket around me.

Using the Fourth’s Skill Speed, I was raising the ship’s movement speed. With its size, and the fact we were at sea, the feeling of using the Skill was strangely different.

I carried out adjustments, and felt it gradually scrape away at my Mana.

But because I had more of it than before, I was somehow able to maintain it.

“… Could I become one with the sea, and just forget it all?”

When I muttered that, I heard Vera-san’s voice.

“I don’t think you have skill as a poet. And I can’t quite recommend it. So you’d best not toss yourself overboard.”

I slowly rolled to look behind me, and there she stood. Looking up…

“Black… it suits you well.”

Shutting her mouth, Vera sat down, and handed over a drink. The cup contained soup.

She was angry, but she didn’t do anything to me.

“You sure have some composure. Drink that, and get up.”

“… I was sure you would kick me.”

I said, as I took the cup. When I took it to my mouth, I found it was quite tasty. This and that had happened, but as expected, my body was seeking out nutrition.

I raised my torso, and sat, while Vera-san leaned her back against me.

“… The one I told you about, the person I like. He’s my sister’s boyfriend.”

I put myself on guard, thinking she’d bring up my Growth, but it seems that wasn’t the case.

“From the start, the only ones to come closer were men aiming for the Trēs House. You’re the same, aren’t you? You’re the first to go that far, mind you.”

“… I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. You’ll make me sad. Hah… I saw a dream yesterday. It was the continuation of the one I always saw.”

Listening to the talks of her dreams, I drank the soup from the cup. It seems she often saw dreams of sinking to the ocean’s depths.

“But last night, I saw a dream of climbing back onto land. It was a bit of a relief. With this, I feel I can go on without too much worry.”

“Um, why are you telling all this to me?”

Vera-san thought a little, before standing. After brushing off her skirt, she started walking away. And she turned.

“Who knows? That’s just the sort of mood I was in. I feel I should thank you for my dreams as well. And I wanted you to understand I won’t fall so easily, perhaps? Though to Mr. Ladykiller, I’m sure I’m just a single woman of the legions around you.”

She said that with a smile, and left.

(I said I wouldn’t do anything, and she’d fall, did I? … That post-Growth me sure is an idiot… no, that would be me.)

I thought of calling something back to her, but my voice wouldn’t come out.

15 - the Northern Powers

… Clara Bulmer stood on the deck, with her staff in her hands, and sighed.

“I really did it…”

By the elation of her post-Growth, she had ended up toxic to her surroundings. She hung her head.

“It’s at times like these that I’m truly jealous of elves like Eva, and quilins like May. I hear they don’t change much during Growths… Novem-san and Shannon-chan don’t seem to change much either.”

Lyle alone stood out extraordinarily, but Aria, Miranda and Clara had a stream of failures post-Growth.

With this time’s defeat of Tressy, everyone showed a change in their physical state right after. They weren’t bedridden, but even so when Growths overtook everyone around, Clara found herself unable to calmly remain in her room.

She wasn’t one to mind it, but she somehow didn’t want to return.

Aria and Miranda were now sleeping in the room with their blankets wrapped around them. So Clara left, and came up to the deck.

“A post-Growth’s elation… I need to learn to contain it.”

Even if she attempted to restrain it herself, it wasn’t something that could be restrained. That’s why so many people raised problems.

Sinking into those darker sentiments, Clara heard a voice call out to her from behind. It was Vera.

Raising up her bright red parasol, she touched her other hand to her hip.

“Huh? Is it just you, Clara? Why are you alone?”

Turning around, Clara answered honestly.

“I don’t want to face any of my comrades right now. Could you understand my sentiment?”

When she said that, Vera sympathized, and nodded. And Clara looked at the parcel Vera held in the hand against her side.

“What’s in the box?”

“This? Ah, it’s a spare gun, and I was thinking of giving it to Lyle…t-that guy only has a few mass-produced sabres as weapons, right? I have a few spares myself. Y-you think he’ll like it? And we haven’t been able to see each other lately, so…”

Seeing how Vera had become more talkative, Clara was shocked. Of all else, when she averted her eyes a bit from Clara, and said Lyle’s name, she looked a little confused.

(This girl really is falling. Lyle-san, you’re needlessly proficient.)

And Clara looked at the box in Vera’s hands.

“A gun, is it? I’m also interested, but I don’t have the knowledge to use one, so I’m hesitant to dabble in it. I don’t think Lyle-san has such knowledge either… does he?”

Why does he know something like that? Clara had pondered such a thing of the boy many times on a regular basis.

She had seen actions that couldn’t just be written off as that Lyle was talented. In that case, it wouldn’t be strange for him to possess the knowledge to use a gun.

“Are you curious? I see… then come to my room.”

“Eh?”

And just like that, Clara was on the way to Vera’s room. After entering, Vera took out a number of boxes from her assorted belongings, and placed them on the table.

It was smaller than the one Vera used, but it was a revolver-style gun. On top of that, she placed three box-fulls of ammunition.

“You can have it.”

“No, um… I can’t accept something so expensive.”

As Clara said something like that, Vera smiled.

“It’s a prior investment. The country handling in that gun’s bullets are our company. And if it will be used by a promising party, it’s a cheap buy.”

Accepting it, Clara took the gun out of the box, and tried taking a stance.

“While it’s small, it’s a Magic Tool. I can’t tell you what Skills were inscribed on it, but it lessens the recoil. You can even use it with one hand. Ah, don’t point it at people. And…”

After Vera gave Clara a simple explanation of how to handle it, they went out over the sea, and tried firing off some actual rounds. The gun Clara accepted had a lower output than Vera’s. But it was more than enough for self-defense.

And like that, until the sun set, Clara learned how to handle a gun from Vera…

❼

The countries north of Bahnseim contained some that had been hostile for many years.

The country called【Cartaffs】was one placed in a harsh environment. They had tried many times to march into the abundance of Bahnseim to their south.

Of course, Bahnseim was sure to respond in kind, so both sides had hostile relations with one another.

But recently, there hadn’t been any drastic movement, and from Bahnseim’s point of view, they were seen on as nothing but a country they had once been at war with.

At the major port of such a country, the Vera Trēs arrived right on schedule.

As I descended the gangway, the sailors waved at me from atop the Ship.

“Go get ‘em, Mr. Lyle.”
“Tell tales of our travels when you get back, Mr. Lyle.”
“You’re gonna make it big, Mr. Lyle.”

Each and every one of them, mr. lyle, mr. lyle… I do understand this is my persecution complex, but even so it made me feel like holding my head, and rolling across the ground.

Standing on land for the first in a while, I felt as if I was still swaying a little.

“Hah… now then, we’ll have to head for the Guild that put out the request, then go and slay a Land Dragon.”

Everyone looked at me, and nodded. Clara pulled on my sleeve.

“Lyle-san, could you give your salutations to Vera-san? She should still be somewhere around the gangway.”

Looking around, I saw Vera-san had disembarked, and she had her parasol out, with a parcel in both hands.

She was holding quite an expensive-looking box, and averting her eyes from me.

“Me? I already did that, but… very well.”

Following Clara’s words, I headed for Vera-san, and she handed over that box to me. From that relatively large box, I felt a profound weight.

“Eh? Um…?”

When I looked confused, she spoke.

“You can have that. You gave us the Magic Stone, and it would leave a bad taste in my mouth if I only pay your reward… I-I just thought something like this would be nice too.”

“Yes, is that so? You even threw in a bonus, so personally, I’ve no complaints.”

When I looked at the box, she told me to ‘try opening it’.

So I took off the lid, and inside was a black, expensive-looking gun. It was revolver-type, and I thought I had seen its shape somewhere before.

“Isn’t this a differently colored version of yours, Vera-san?”

In regards to that.

“Just Vera is fine. It’s not just color, mine is made of the rare metal gold. That one’s also rare metal, but… well, it’s just a spare. T-there’s no deeper meaning.”

When I gazed at the gun, the Seventh let his voice.

『… The fact that it’s rare metal mean’s its sturdy, and probably a Magic Tools with Skills engraved on it. It definitely isn’t cheap.』

The Fifth even…

『Twenty one rounds… just how much would one of those shots go for? It’s definitely a weapon of the rich.』

I thought the same, but if she was handing it over, I would accept. I wanted to try firing one, but carrying one around didn’t sound bad either.

“Thank you… I’ll treasure it.”

When I said that, she hid her face with her parasol, and started back up the gangway.

“I see. Well, go do your best. I think we’ll depart in around three weeks, so make sure you’re back here by then.”

After I replied, she hastened her pace, and disappeared into the ship.

“… As I thought, she’s angry.”

The Fourth, on my opinion.

『This time was a failure. Well, it would be a lie to say you weren’t

aiming for it, but there shouldn't be a problem. She's quite a big-shot anyways.』

I repented over how I angered her with my Growth, as I raised my expectations for how much Tressy's materials would sell for.

(I'd be grateful for two or three thousand.)

I thought, as I headed back to my comrades. The Third let out a fed-up voice.

『… Hah, you're all no good. Fourth, all you're good at is currying favor.』

He let out a sigh.

❼

I had dropped by the Cartaffs Guild that had put out the Land Dragon Subjugation Request.

But there, they informed me…

"Y-you can't buy them off!?"

"I-I deeply apologize."

The bespectacled male receptionist pressed himself against the counter, as he apologized to me. When I asked the reason…

"Um… we've confirmed those are indeed Trident Serpent materials. But you see. With this Guild's scale, we don't deal with monster materials of that level, and when it comes to Trident Serpents, just what standard could we use to price them…"

They had never dealt with it before, so they had no idea what sum to put up.

Miranda, who'd come to the Guild with me spoke to the receptionist.

"Where is the largest Guild in Cartaffs? Do you think they will buy it?"

The receptionist spoke apologetically.

“If you just want to sell them, anywhere would work. But I can’t say anything to a fair price… and it’s uncertain what those materials would be suited to; it’s unknown if they have any use in manufacturing at all. If you sell them, both sides may be unsatisfied with this transaction, so most Guilds will be reluctant to deal in them. What’s more, the objectives of the Guilds of Cartaffs aren’t as flexible as others.”

Perhaps having regulations more severe than others was Cartaffs’ characteristic. Within the countries Guilds, it seems such a policy had been taken up.

“If it were the Magic Stone, you could probably receive between five to ten thousand. But the materials will depend on future research. What’s more, they’re not materials one can find a steady supply of, so they’re not something Cartaffs would want at all costs… w-well! You came from Beim, did you not? Then bringing it back to Beim is the best option! Even if you do, I can’t say how much it will go for.”

After so much trouble, on top of all my expectations of how high they would sell for, Tressy’s materials…

They were rare, but he said no one knew what use they had.

(So I should have confirmed it with Vera-san, and stopped while I was ahead.)

In my high tensions, I had no intentions of conceding the crown, so I had refused her proposals.

As my stream of capital became dubious, the Third spoke.

『Well, since you defeated Tressy, you can sell your name, so is it really that much a problem? Getting the Trēs House in your debt was already a merit. In the first place, Tressy wasn’t part of our plans.』

When he said it, I recalled my goal had simply bean to beat a Land Dragon, and raise my name. The fund-raising was to come afterwards.

(Yes, if you think of it like that…)

I spoke to the Guild receptionist.

“Then I’ll bring the materials back to Beim. Now about your Land Dragon problems.”

The male receptionist made a relieved expression.

“You’ve defeated a Trident Serpent, so I can leave it to your party with peace of mind. The location, if you’ll look at this map, is right around here.”

Taking out a map, the man informed me.

And he said he’d prepare a guide to get us there.

“A local adventurer?”

“Yes. Well… it may sound rude, but every place has its own set of rules. You’ve come all the way here at our request, but even so, breaking such unwritten rules will invite the hatred of the guild, and its adventurers.”

Miranda touched her hand to her chin.

“I get where he’s coming from. And it’s better to have a guide than not. Lyle, I think we should hire them. And they’re trustworthy, right?”

On Miranda’s look, the receptionist nodded.

“They’re an adventure party even we rely on. There’s no doubt they’re skilled.”

He told us he’d contact the party that would guide us tomorrow, so we returned to our inn to rest for the day.

❼

Night.

As I slept, I came into the Jewel for the first time in a while.

I crossed my arms in front of my room, thinking over whether I should enter it, or if it would be irrelevant for what was to come.

Behind me, the ancestors were discussing this time's request.

The Third brought up the conversation at the Guild.

『Skilled, but can't win against a Land Dragon, is it… I think that's a bit dicey.』

Rather than that, the Fourth was surprised over the cheapness of Tressy's materials.

『It's a famous monster. Why does it sell for so low once defeated? It's true we took it apart, so it can't be stuffed, but it should still have its value.』

The Seventh sighed at the Fourth's opinion.

『All that matters is that people know Lyle defeated it. That's just how valuable it is. Well, sell it once we return to Beim, and there won't be a problem. But what should I say about Cartaffs' Guild…』

The Fifth took over the Seventh's doubts.

『It felt quite rigid. Some may say that's for the better, but it didn't bring about a good result for us. Perhaps it was better than having them buy it simply because it was rare. But you could call them too pragmatic.』

The Third didn't know too much about Cartaffs. When he was alive, it was a land far, far away.

『More importantly, you guys know about the wars between Cartaffs and Bahnseim, right? Is it on hold from injuries? Or are there still skirmishes happening about?』

The one to answer was the Seventh.

『They haven't been warring as of late. Our territory was too far to consider sending reinforcements, but perhaps there are some small squabbles still going on? There were only two large-scale wars over the course of my life.』

Should I think only two? Or You already had two? … As a Bahnseimian, I felt it was best I didn't ask.

In front of the door.

I approached, and tried opening it just a bit.

Through the narrow gap, my eyes met with the blue eyes of Celes peering back.

『Oh, so you won't come in? You damn coward!』

"Gyaaah!!"

I hurriedly tried to shut it, but Celes' hand reached out to prevent that. When I kicked that hand by reflex, she laughed to herself before retreating back into the room.

And after I shut the door, I took some distance from it.

『What are you doing, Lyle? If you're that curious, just try going in.』

When the Seventh said that, the Fifth too.

『The only ones who haven't entered yet are you and the Fourth.』

When I looked over to the Fourth, he averted his eyes, and corrected his glasses with a shaking hand.

『… Everyone has something they're not good at. I don't have the courage to go out before an angry Bridget.』

Just how scared could he be, I thought, but I had also been surprised into retreat by Celes.

"And wait, why is Celes in my room of memories?"

The third crossed his hands, and made just a bit of a serious expression.

『I've no idea. Well, perhaps there'll be some progress as things go on, but for now, you should concentrate on the job before you.』

The Third said that in his usual aloof smile.

❼

… Arumsaas.

An automaton in a tailcoat prepared black tea, and presented it to his master.

Celes accepted it, and after enjoying the fragrance, she took a sip.

“Excellent. It’s quite a splendid taste. Even as you hate me so, seeing you serve me with all your might is delightful.”

She relaxed in an extravagant room, and nearby, a young girl absentmindedly sat in an armchair, her black hair growing all the way to the floor.

Her eyes were covered with her hair, and the only visible parts of her face were her nose and mouth.

The male-model butler automaton with his red hair cut short spoke.

“Your praise brings absolutely no pleasure to me. Because it is only the natural result. Good grief, being left with no one to serve was one thing, but being forced into the service of one I bear such sentiment towards is a curse on my being.”

When the automaton said that, Celes laughed to herself.

And she looked over the room.

In it, the influential scholars of the City of scholars were looking at her with passion.

“I’ve taken a liking to you. I hated that that trash had something I did not, but you’re even more wonderful than the maid he carried around.”

The academy’s principal sounded delighted.

“Thank you very much. He is an automaton the academy put all our resources to reviving. Unlike the maids, they’re characterized by possessing a wide array of functions without add-ons.”

Celes' Automaton.

The automaton named【Burt】spoke annoyed.

"I never thought I would be compared to those fakes from a country who know nothing but how to imitate. Yes, being compared to those failures is… unpleasant."

He was a tall butler in his twenties… Holding his head high, his expression truly was an annoyed one.

Celes laughed.

"Then will you destroy Lyle's automaton? I don't mind. Of course, I've no idea where they are, or anything."

Burt looked upon Celes' smile expressionlessly.

"I must refrain. My sole objective is to serve you. And can you imagine how unpleasant that is already making me feel?"

Celes finished her black tea, reaching a hand to the confectionaries, before stuffing them into her mouth with an immodest gesture.

The confectionaries Burt made were delicious, and with a cute smile appropriate her age, she ate with stuffed cheeks.

Burt spoke.

"How improper. Your mouth is sullied."

Saying that, he immediately brought a handkerchief to her mouth, and gently wiped it off. Regardless of how much he disliked or hated her, serving with all his might was the role of an automaton.

Celes let out a sigh.

"Delicious tea and snacks… but I really wanted to meet Professor Damien. I never thought he would say he was off for a round of the Labyrinth and flee. Because of that, I ended up going all the way up and beating the Fiftieth Floor Boss looking for him. The guild receptionists even got mad at me for it, so I ended up killing them."

She put out her tongue in a cute gesture.

But even hearing that, the leaders of Arumsaas.

“What, after looking into it, it had already extended past fifty.”

“As long as the Labyrinth doesn’t disappear, there isn’t a problem. And even if you were to clear the Labyrinth, we would have nothing but gratitude to you, Celes-sama.”

“Even so, Damien… he shall be permanently exiled from Arumsaas.”

Looking at the delighted leaders, the black-haired girl muttered.

“… Killing dozens with a smile. You weren’t even particularly angry.”

On those words, Celes looked at the black-haired girl.

“I wasn’t mad. But I didn’t like their attitude. And it’s important that I punished them for making me go through something so pointless. If it’s only receptionists, they have any number of replacements.”

Hearing that, Burt spoke.

“Making a bloodbath of everyone working at the guild, and that’s your reaction… good grief, why am I consigned to such an unpleasant master… if this was how it was to be, staying dead would have been preferable.”

Celes remembered the faces the last staff members had made as they cried and begged, and she grinned.

“Now then, what should we play next?”

As Celes laughed in Arumsaas, she gently stroked the hilt of her rapier as she though over the next game to play.

And on it, the yellow Jewel sparkled…

16 - The Queen of Cartaffs

As I walked through the streets of Cartaffs, Bahnseim, Aumsaas, Beim… I noticed the difference it had to the places I'd been.

I hadn't felt it in Zayin or Lorphys either. Cartaffs' characteristic air.

The orderly townscape was the same, but the buildings looked much too practical. On top of that, the patrolling soldiers walking around.

The uniforms they wore were unified, and I couldn't see any knights.

The first one to notice it was the Seventh.

『… I heard Cartaffs gathered its personnel regardless of class. I see, so they're thoroughly ability-centered.』

They did have a nobility system, for what it's worth, but that wasn't everything. I think it's a good thing they recognize talent regardless of social status.

But carrying out something like that would generate considerable opposition.

So I must assume Cartaffs' leader has at least enough ability to subdue them. Or perhaps they had to learn to do so, or else.

The Third lay out his own thoughts.

『Bahnseim to the south… Cartaffs is also a large country, but their national powers are too far apart. As this country can't even cooperate with its surroundings, it's thinkable it's been refined by the threat of Bahnseim. But they've become this practical, have they… well, it may just be their character.』

Character, or a geographic reason, whatever the case, there wasn't a doubt it was a strong nation.

The Fifth looked at the town.

『Bahnseim's north… it would be nice if we can get them to help out

when Llye makes his move.』

I thought the same, but the current me wasn't significant enough for Cartaffs to take me seriously if I asked for assistance. What's more, as a noble of the country they hate so…

The Fourth.

『But you would never think Cartaffs' Queen was the Queen Eva-chan had sung of.』

I looked at Eva walking beside me.

Even taking an elf like her around, the surrounding reactions were normal. A change from Bahnseim, Arumsaas or Beim, where at times, you could find some prejudice.

Eva looked around her.

"It's quite cold here. I should've brought a coat… even so, when you see demi-humans walking around so normally, it makes one think it's a good country."

I questioned her use of, 'makes one think'. So I tried asking.

"Doesn't that mean they're truly appointing anyone skilled irrelevant to status? It's a good country, isn't it?"

There, the Fourth explained it to me.

『You just don't get it, Lyle. It's best you don't look at nothing but the good side of ability-centric government. To everything, there are merits, and demerits to be found.』

Hearing that, I tilted my head, and after Eva looked around, and confirmed there were no soldiers around, she spoke.

"Look at it the other way, and useless people and demi-humans are looked upon coldly. The reason the Guild receptionist tried so hard to stay out of your way surely because you're a skilled one. I tried asking a few of my brethren, but apparently the gap in treatment is a large one. It may be better than a class system, but it feels there's no room to breathe."

So talented ones were respected, and the rest despised.

The strength of that outlook must also be Cartaffs' characteristic.

The Fifth offered some admiration to Eva.

『Still, having brethren elves everywhere sure is convenient for gathering information. What's more, just saying【Nihil】gets a different reaction. A relatively favorable one at that.』

The Nihil Tribe… it was a tribe that held meaning to the elves.

When it came to gathering information, even within the party, Eva was a skilled one. She had her own information network, and she could easily lay hands on info the rest of us wouldn't be able to touch.

Novem and Miranda were also good at it, but as Eva was easily able to collect info in whatever town we stopped by, she was surely a hard-to-get existence.

When we walked down the street together, perhaps it was a relatively large town, as there were a lot of people around.

There were food stalls lined around, with line ups of rare edibles.

"They have quite a variety of meat. I do get the feeling sweets and the like are scarce, though."

Eva looked at the carts and booths.

"It seems sweets are precious here. Come to think of it, the ship had some sugar loaded as well. The sailors were delighted when they found it was undamaged."

The large load of cargo loaded on the ship was safe, and Vera was relieved. The country was trading for its insufficient commodities with Beim.

And as we were working in Cartaffs, we were exploring the town until the time came. On top of getting acquainted with our guides, we were scheduled to set up our plans today.

I also wanted to learn what to look out for on the terrain.

And once that was over, we would finish up our preparations, an set out.

“… It’s right about time. Shall we head for the guild?”

Saying that, the two of us set off for the guild, but hearing some rowdy voices, I turned in that direction. Eva was watching as well.

The surrounding people were walking around a group of feuding adventurers. There were some rubberneckers, but most went right on with their business.

“Could it be a fight? Looks like it’s between adventurers.”

Eva was curious. Thinking of things as seeds for stories, showing such interest in these sorts of things was her virtue, as well as her flaw.

From what I could see, some middle-aged adventurers were surrounding a party of younger ones.

Looking at them…

“They’re the same as us.”

The young adventurer party with an extreme inclination in gender ration was surrounded by an elder party of five.

But it seems the one at fault was…

“Hand off the guide role? Are you sure you ain’t an idiot!?”

The elder male adventurer confronted the young man. In contrast to the elder adventurer party’s orderly equipment, the young adventurers’ gear looked unreliable.

But they did have an air to them.

They were strangely calm, and it didn’t look as if an oblivious one was trying to pick a fight. Eva had noticed as well, as she quietly watched over them.

The garments they wore had a sense of cleanliness, but their appearances were gaudy. Pierces and necklaces, they also had

rings.

The longsword on the man's back alone was splendid enough to put it at odds with his other clothes. His age was perhaps a little over mine?

Gray hair, and green eyes… he was of high stature, and of trained body.

"I heard it. You're guiding a party that defeated a Trident Serpent, aren't you? Ans it seems they've got some pretty ladies with them. I'd like to try and meet them too. And unlike you small fries who needed to call adventurers from Beim to defeat something like a Land Dragon, I'll go and take it out while I'm out guiding."

If he was just an oblivious kid, he's be mocked, and that would be the end of it. But the air he gave off made it feel like he could actually do it.

From the Jewel, the Third let his voice.

『… You'll find unreasonably strong people wherever you go. Faithful to their desires, the type that doesn't think of the trouble they're causing to their surroundings.』

The elder adventurer shot back at the young one.

"And I'm askin' if you're an idiot. This 's an official request from the Guild. If you're complaining to someone, complain to the Guild."

Eva tugged at my sleeve, and pointed around.

"Lyle, look around. The ones who've stopped are almost all women."

"Now that you mention it."

Around us, there were woman staring as if to bite into the young adventurer. There were woman who were different as well, but I couldn't easily tell them apart.

(I guess he looks cool?)

When I looked at the adventurer, wondering if it were a matter of looks, the Fourth spoke.

『Something feels off. And… Lyle, go look into him.』

I used Skills to try obtaining information on him. There, I was able to see the young adventurer was using some sort of Skill.

(It reacts to women… is it influencing their psyche?)

One of the women following behind the man looked at me. It seems she noticed I had done something.

Our eyes met, and the woman pulled at the adventurer's arm, and pointed at me.

"Lyle, you've been seen."

As Eva looked between me, and the young adventurer party, the bystanders that didn't want to get involved opened up a path between us.

"Ah? Who are you? Oh, you've got quite a cutie with you. Hey, is she any use?"

On the words of the young man pointing at Eva, the woman who noticed me nodded. And she even gave him a warning.

"Larc-sama, you mustn't involve yourself. Those two… are remarkable. Nothing like the adventurers you'd find in these parts."

"… Then let's go."

Perhaps irritated by the woman's words, the young adventurer clicked his tongue at us. As the elder adventurers remained wary, they parted from the crowd.

Evaluating the situation, the Seventh spoke.

『What a troublesome fellow. When he hears he can't win, he steps down that easily. Erhart, was it? It's as if a guy like Erhart actually had some skill backing him.』

As the elder adventurers began walking towards us, the Third spoke.

『Cartaffs looked fun, doesn't it? A Queen, and a young, ambitious

adventurer… doesn't it sound exhilarating?』

The Fifth painstakingly voiced his opinion.

『Is that so? Let's defeat the Land Dragon, and get back safely.』

The Fourth to the young adventurer.

『I wonder if that guy will raise some trouble. I want a chance for us to have an audience with the Queen. Do you think they'll become the trigger for us?』

And as always, the Seventh let out an anti-adventurer declaration.

『That sort always brings trouble, but I wonder if it'll go that far. How about we hunt down the buds of calamity while we still have the chance? That one's quite dangerous, you know?』

❼

… In the Cartaffs' citadel city's royal palace, a single woman read through a report.

Sitting on a splendid sofa, she wore black garb that stuck close to her body. Near her, a long and slender sword leaned against her seat.

Turning to lie down, the woman reading the documents stroked her long, waved, aubergine hair, as she raised the upper half of her body.

Looking back over a passage that caught her interest, she lightly touched her tongue to her red lips.

"Hmm, how interesting. They defeated the Trident Serpent, did they… I heard the Trēs Trading Company's ship had been attacked, but…"

Continuing down the intriguing document, it seems the ones who brought the materials to the Guild were instead a group of adventurers.

“Does logic even work on that lot at the guild? Buy it off, and they could’ve been the first to research it. I did tell them to collect rare specimens, but I didn’t tell them what to do when the specimens were too rare. Do I really have to give another in-depth explanation?”

The fed-up woman reached a hand to her sword nearby. Drawing it from its scabbard, she looked at its bright red blade.

“It’s been a while since I last went outside, but… my subordinates won’t allow it.”

Sheathing it away, she stood, placed the documents on top of her table, and looked through the last item on the list.

This time, her expression twisted in disdain.

“That Larc guy is asking for yet another audience? I told them not to deal with him, but… the one handling the reception was a woman, I see. Then there’s no helping it.”

She violently tossed only the last page aside, and headed for an extravagant desk in the room.

The woman’s name was【Ludmila Cartaffs】… Once called the princess knight, she was now called Queen, as a member of Cartaffs’ royalty.

After sitting in her chair, and resuming her work, a laugh came from her lips.

“Still, how interesting. Shall I give a summons to that Trēs Trading Company? And the adventurers that came from Beim… I never thought I’d see the surname Walt come up. How interesting. He may not be of Bahnseim’s Walt house, but how curious.”

Having been temporarily left the throne from the previous king, she was not an official Queen.

But it was also true that everyone supported her in becoming one. As the princess knight, she had earned much support throughout the country, and she was somewhat a symbol of Cartaffs.

A woman like that was now going through stacks of paperwork.

“Now then, how should I call them out… but first…”

Before the mountain of forms, Ludmila covered her eyes, and brushed away her bangs with one hand to verify it. But when she opened her eyes the same mountain stood before her, just as it had before.

“Nothing will start unless this is out of the way.”

Saying that, she got back to work.

Epilogue

Inside the forest.

I stood before the earth colored Land Dragon as it brushed and trampled trees aside, coming for me.

Huge forelimbs.

A large head.

In contrast, its lower body looked small in comparison to its top.

The land dragon of the First's memories had been of ashen skin, but the ones here were the color of the dirt, and looked a size or two smaller.

We had the adventurers that'd guided us return, and we took on the multiple Land Dragons… four in total.

I held up my sabre in my right hand, and confirmed the surrounding situation.

"Aria and Miranda don't have a problem. May, Eva and Clara as well. Novem and Monica… it looks like I didn't even have to worry about them from the start."

The party split in four, and each team took on one of the Dragons. With those four bodies, they had likely worked up their coordination to take on the adventurers and knights that came for them.

And their movements did show signs of cooperation, making them quite troublesome foes.

Behind me, Shannon…

"I could've just stood on standby in Porter! Why did you have to take me along!?"

… Was bawling.

I didn't want to bring her along, but Miranda told me to. It seems she thought some sort of change would come about if we kept piling the girl with all sorts of life experience.

She did have Demon Eyes, but Shannon wasn't a fighter. She was the intellect type that was supposed to manipulate people from the back stage.

Having been pulled from her comfortable back seat, she was more of the party's mascot than anything else.

(Mascot… between Monica and Shannon, would it have to be Shannon?)

While I thought that, the Land Dragon before my eyes, turned its head up, and was about to let out a roar. Perhaps it was an attempt to regroup with its comrades.

In the dark forest of crowded trees, only the places the Dragons rampaged about were becoming wide open space.

Thus, after entering the forest, finding them was easy. But we hadn't heard anything about there being four.

"My ears are going to start hurting, so could you pipe down? Lightning!"

I turned my left hand to the Land Dragon, discharging electricity right at its head. My output had risen from before, and after a large sway, it took a step back.

From behind, Shannon…

"Just keep on hitting them in! That's all you got to do to win!"

Naturally, if I did that, I would win. But at present, I was…

『Lyle, don't forget to send orders around as you fight.』

『Look, May-chan's party is troubled. Clara-chan is remaining stationary, awaiting order.』

『Look at the big picture. If precise direction is impossible, broad orders are fine. Take in the surrounding situation, and convey it with

your Skill.』

『You've got to train yourself up as a commander as well. And this is a perfect opponent for that. Go do your best, Lyle.』

I don't think a Land Dragon is a perfect opponent, but certainly, as we were, we could take on four of them.

That's the fighting force we possessed, however, giving out orders as I fought the enemy before me was difficult. What's more, my comrades were fighting quite a ways away.

Making a gesture of touching my left hand to my ear, I verified the state of my other comrades.

I verified it, and gave orders.

"Clara, there are small fries gathering around. I leave Eva and May's support to you; don't let those peons get closer."

『Yes.』

After taking her handgun from the holster at her waist, she held it towards the direction of the approaching monsters. The gun she got from Vera was smaller than the one given to me, but it was an easy-to-use model.

"Miranda, you need not push yourself, attack after restraining it. When my hands are free, I'll come over to support."

『Ye~ah, it looked like it'll be over before that.』

Looking through Miranda's field of vision, I saw the Land Dragon was unable to move a muscle from her new Skill.

It was as if its movements were sealed by countless spider webs, and the Land Dragon frantically writhed to free itself from those sticky threads.

Aria cut at it, shaving away a thick chunk of flesh.

"… I see. Then onto the last one. Monica… Novem… fight properly, won't you?"

After finding there were no problems on Miranda's side, I looked to Novem. The Land Dragon in front of me warily took some distance.

I stuck my sabre into the ground, and pulled a gun from the holster on my back hip. When I turned the black revolver towards the Land Dragon and fired, the bullet missed the massive target, and sunk into one of the trees behind it.

Behind me, Shannon covered her mouth.

"… Pff!"

And from my comrades connected to me…

『Lyle, did you even practice? Quite trying to look cool, and get yourself together!』

Hearing Aria's irritated voice, I sent my mind back to Novem's station to give orders.

"Monica, you should at least try to coordinate attacks."

『Even if you tell me that so late in the game… and I am discontent with my deployment. What are you trying to do by putting me alongside that vixen? If I, Monica, am not beside my Chicken Dickwad, I cannot muster up any power.』

Novem, on the other hand…

『Monica-san, I'm going to use some magic, so could you keep it in one place?』

She was taking it easy.

The Third told me there was a problem with my personnel assignment.

『Lyle, be careful with formation. Novem's side has excess war potential. You should have stationed Monica there alone, and have Novem-chan circle around to support the others or you.』

The Fourth agreed.

『And there's that splitting your party in four business. Would've

worked better if you split into three or two, and had each group work together to pick them off one at a time. 』

As they continued finding fault, I finished giving orders, and with the revolver still in my hand, I used my left to pull my sabre out of the ground.

“If I can’t hit, I need only get closer!”

I kicked the ground to approach the Land Dragon, getting into point blank, before pulling the trigger again.

When the bullet hit its tough skin, its output was surely enough to pierce it. But it didn’t have much an effect on the Land Dragon’s large build.

It swiped at me with its large forelimbs, so I jumped over, and tossed my sabre, piercing through its left eye.

After landing, to stay out of its field of vision, I circled around to the left, held up my gun, and aimed for its remaining right eye.

One shot. Two shots.

The bullets that missed hit the Land Dragon’s ferocious lower jaw, but they didn’t pierce through.

(If I used it with the Second’s Skill, perhaps I could hit, but…)

To get some practice, I was firing without using the Skill. Thanks to that, I couldn’t hit a thing.

The Fifth observed the gun’s output.

『No wonder they’re not catching on. Even if it may be a Dragon Subspecies, if it would be this ineffective, I would never think to pay a fortune for one. And while its usage is easier than a bow, just how inaccurate could it possibly be… as I thought, guns are out of the question.』

The Seventh refuted that opinion.

『That’s because it’s a Magic Tool, and we’re not using it as one! If you used the Skills engraved on it, its firepower will rise!』

They interfered with the Jewel's Skill, so my affinity with Magic Tools wasn't the best. There wasn't a problem in using it as a revolver, but if I was going to use it as a Magic Tool, I would have to cut off my Jewel's Skills.

The Fourth spoke up as well.

『Isn't its very premise off? I do think it's a convenient tool to carry around, but at this rate, it's a bit… I would never think of assembling a number of them.』

Finally closing in, I destroyed the Land Dragon's eye, jumped back, and put the gun back in its holster.

Holding up both hands…

"Thunder Clap!"

Lightning fell from the sky. Shannon's body trembled as she hid behind a tree.

But the lightning hit its designated mark, and slowly falling to the ground, the Land Dragon let off a burnt scent.

The Third evaluated the battle.

『Using a powerful magic strike after robbing it of its vision… not bad, but as I thought, against hard-skinned opponents, you don't have enough means of attack.』

If I used the Jewel, and took out the giant sword, the battle would be over in seconds. But it was bad that I didn't have any other choices.

The Sword, Bow, and Halberd had large Mana expenditures.

If I met a powerful foe while I was low on Mana, my present state was one where I could only run away. Of course, I had my comrades with me, so the probability of that happening was low.

The Fifth put a simple strategy to mouth.

『… It's weapons. In Lyle's case, he has a bad affinity with Magic Tools. In that case, he should get a few Skill-less sturdy weapons to

carry around. There are some weapons out there that can cut iron in their base state. It looks like the time has come for him to carry such a thing around.』

After the Fifth said that much, the Fourth agreed. It seems he had been thinking my mass-produced sabre expenditure was a problem for quite some time now.

『You run through a few disposable sabres every time. Thinking of the future, it's right around time you looked into some finely crafted pieces, and analyzed cost/performance.』

On both an ability and financial level, the time had come for me to look for such a weapons.

Turning around, I called over to Shannon.

"Shannon, the others should finish their battles soon. Until then, we'll stay on standby here."

I hesitated over whether or go to their aid, but the battles were already nearing their ends.

Shannon came over to me, and…

"… Onee-sama slaying dragons… I would never have even imagined it before. How did she get to be like that, I wonder. "

As she hung her head, I…

"That one's your fault, you know."

Saying that, I waited for everyone to gather. It was at that moment.

I felt something suspicious, and turned. Shannon looked at me, turned her eyes in that direction, and narrowed them.

There was nothing coming from my Skills. Too little of anything, really.

The Fifth sounded a little nervous.

『Our Skills can't pick them up? No, do they have a Skill that prevents it from being picked up? Lyle, on your guard.』

As Shannon and I continued to stare, it seems we made them wary, as they took some distance.

Shannon spoke.

“They’re somehow floating a bit from their surroundings, but do they think that’s actually hiding them from anything?”

She tilted her head, as her eyes followed the fleeing group.

❼

… Miranda looked at her Skill【Wire Net】stretching across the trees.

Even if it was only a subspecies of dragon, one mustn’t make light of a Land Dragon’s power. Yet such a beast was entangled in her threads, with Aria sitting on top of its head. She was short of breath.

Blood flowed down its neck, and it was forming a red pond on the ground.

Miranda remained wary of her surroundings.

“Well that was needlessly violent. You’re like a hero from some storybook, Aria.”

As Miranda said that with a smile, Aria used her hand to wipe off the blood splattered on her, and spoke regretfully.

“Well thanks for that. More importantly, any contact from Lyle…”

At that moment, perhaps the two of them heard Lyle’s voice, as they let out sighs.

Miranda verified her location.

“Looks like no one needed his help.”

Aria jumped down from the head, stood on the ground, and turned to looked at the strung-up Land Dragon’s body.

“… We surely didn’t need any here, but I’ll bet the others were fine

too. Even so, you Skill sure is a nasty one, Miranda.”

Without letting her smile die out, Miranda spoke.

“Why thank you. Your Skill is manly and cool, Aria.”

They shared some cynicism, before checking over their equipment, and returning to Lyle.

With the information they could perceive from Lyle’s Skill, they were able to proceed through the forest without getting lost…

❼

… A small-built girl used her slender legs to kick away the Land Dragon’s massive forelimbs.

After letting her body spin in the air, May kicked up the approaching Land Dragon head as well.

The difference in their body sizes was much too great, yet it looked as if she was playing with the monster.

“Hah, it would be easier to do in quilin form, but Lyle won’t permit it.”

The Land Dragon tried to attack, so she swung her horn, and its large arm flew off.

Watching over her, Eva held up her bow.

“Hey, hurry up and end it! We have to deal with other monsters too over here!”

She shot through an approaching Frog-like monster.

Clara also took some on, to test out the gun she had just received.

Looking at them, May…

“Aren’t you pulling them so they don’t wander off to the others? And we have the most people at this station, so please bear with it.”

Confirming Lyle had finished his battle, May swiped her right hand,

and lopped off the Land Dragon's head.

Without being hit by a drop of the blood spatter, she got onto the collapsing dragon's back, and feeling the response of something round her, she twitched, and turned in that direction.

There wasn't any info coming from Lyle's Skill, but her five senses told her something was there.

When she sent a glance that direction, the other party stopped, and slowly began to retreat.

May addressed Eva.

"Hey, could you try shooting an arrow over there?"

There, Eva was busy dealing with the other monsters, so it wasn't happening.

"Can't! So won't you help out over here!?"

May was curious, but if they were just going to go away like that, she thought it would be fine for now, May rushed over to Clara.

There, Clara spoke.

"Wait a moment… Lyly-san said to be wary of our surroundings. Stay together as much as possible, and don't stray, he say. There's something he cannot detect with Skills out there."

She spoke as she opened her revolver's cylinder, and swapped out its cartridges.

She wasn't accustomed to the motions, so she was moving quite inefficiently.

Eva turned to the environment, before inclining her ears, taking out an arrow, and notching it.

"Wait, even Lyle can't detect them? Looks like it's no good if we rely on his Skills too much"

And hearing a sound, Eva shot the arrow towards it.

Even when there was nothing there, the arrow was hit aside, instantly putting the three of them on guard.

May stood up front as if to protect the other two.

“It’s not a monster? Maybe a human.”

They left their backs to one another, as the presence continued distancing itself…

❼

… Monica placed her large hammer on the ground, and looked at the Land Dragon she’d crushed.

While Novem’s magic had stopped its movements, she had circled to the back, and lowered her giant weapon.

Its lower half was in a horrible state, but even so, it could be dealt for a high price, so Monica pat her chest in relief over her household’s finances.

“Hah, with this, we will easily be able to clear the sum we were aiming for. Even so, I cannot accept being paired with that vixen. I am an existence that glimmers precisely because I am serving my Chicken Dickwad. As a supporting cast, my role is to stand diagonally behind that Chicken!”

Looking at Monica riling herself up, Novem gave a bitter smile.

But hearing Lyle’s voice, she inclined her ear to it.

Seeing her gesture, Monica spoke in jealousy.

“God dammit… he even kissed me atop the ship, but when he returns to normal, he says I don’t need one, and chickens out… Hah, just when will his next Fever Time come, I wonder.”

There was already a line between Lyle and Monica, and because of that, using his Skill… Connection… didn’t require a kiss.

Disappointed over that fact, Monica looked over the other members

with envy.

“If that how it’ll be, I’ll increase their calorie intake little by little every day, and bring anguish to their scales.”

After grinning over that flight of mischief, Monica opened her red eye wide, and picked up her hammer.

She took her left hand off its shaft, took a small knife out of her sleeve, and threw it at the spot that was bothering her.

Her eyes could clearly take in the existence Lyle’s Skills couldn’t capture.

Novem held up her staff, and aiming at the place Monica had thrown her knife…

“Earth Hand!”

Arms emerged from the soil with the intent to bind, heading for the invisible enemy. Monica’s knife was floating in the air, and it looked as if it had stabbed into something. From its floating tip, red blood was flowing.

And slowly, both the knife and the blood disappeared.

The Earth Hands made of magic were suddenly torn apart in the air.

Seeing that, Novem surveyed the area.

“… There.”

“Vixen, step back!”

Monica called out, but Novem didn’t dodge.

She changed her staff’s shape, formed a scythe, and blocked the attack of the invisible enemy. Perhaps that surprised the enemy, as they immediately retreated.

Monica was about to give chase, but Lyle gave an order not to follow, so she stopped in her tracks.

Novem looked into the woods, as if to watch the fleeing foe’s back…

❼

“Consarn it! Because of all the information coming in, keeping it on Search backfired.”

When my comrades had all gathered, I severed Connection, and used the Sixth’s Skill… Real Spec… to take in the surrounding situation.

They were hard to see, but surely enough, there were multiple red signals around.

Unaccustomed to it, the others weren’t able to process all the info from Real Spec. It caused headaches, and it was a burden, so I hadn’t made use of it.

Switching to it part-way through would get in the way of the others’ battle, so unable to do that, I could only wait for my comrades to come.

Miranda looked at me as she asked my plans.

“What are you going to do? I don’t think we’ll lose, but we used quite a bit of time coming to this forest. We don’t have much time to waste on playing cat and mouse.”

I thought of what reason the enemy may have to attack us.

(Is it Celes’ doing? Did she or someone around her finally send assassins? But we’re in Cartaffs. If they were going to do it, it would be more efficient to wait in Beim.)

My thoughts wouldn’t come together, but I looked around.

“The forests’ monsters are beginning to act up. After collecting up the materials, let’s return to the Guild. We can’t waste any more time on anything that won’t make us any money.”

Irritating as it may be, we didn’t have the leisure to chase them down.

And the movements they displayed were onlt those to search us out.

On my opinion, the Third in the Jewel agreed.

『You don't have time, so any more is impossible. But make sure you're prepared to deal with them if they attack. Nights will be troublesome.』

I immediately began assigning roles for night watch.

❼

… In a place separated from the forest, Larc pulled out the knife stabbed into his arm.

"That woman… even my Skill was ineffective? Good grief, if I was going to attack, I should've chosen a different group. Maybe get the guy out of the way first."

Observing skilled adventurers.

Their original goal was just to know their war potential, but having felt an urge to try obtaining them, Larc had ended up raising his hand. His approach noticed, he ended up meeting a counterattack.

A female comrade of his apologized.

"I deeply apologize. For them to have one by their side able to see through our Skill…"

"No, they're just making me want them more. Don't need the guy, but the rest are a treasure trove. Though I really didn't know what to think about one of them. If she's strong, I don't mind keeping her at my side."

They were all wearing expensive robes, and each robe had a Skill engraved onto it.

Magic tools to prevent detection by Skills, and by eye sight.

"Larc-sama, let me heal your wounds."

Larc presented his injury to a woman specialized in healing magic, and glared at the one who'd produced the Magic Tools.

“Oy, the magic tools you made actually worked, right?”

The woman nodded a number of times, fearful of his rage.

“I-I’m sorry. B-but… you were able to get close, so they surely had an effect. T-they’re my originals, so they s-shouldn’t be known to the general public.”

He turned his eyes from the cowering woman to the forest, and looked at his fully-healed arm. The wound had closed, and it hadn’t left a scar.

“… I thought my Skill would charm one or two of them, but it was no good. In that case, it would’ve been better to go after the Trēs House’s princess. Dagnabbit! I’ve needlessly wasted some time.”

An annoyed Larc had been able to see the power of Lyle’s forces up close. And once he deduced he would never stand a chance upfront, he immediately went into trying to draw away one or two of their ranks.

A Skill to infatuate the other sex,【Charm】.

Possessing such a skill put Larc at quite an advantageous position when dealing with women.

But that Charm had its limitations.

All it really did was make it easier to get their attention, and if he really wanted to make them his own… he would have to use his Second Stage Skill,【Temptation】.

However, that Temptation had a weakness in that after using it once, he wouldn’t be able to use it for a while.

“… They’re not opponents where the same trick will work twice. We’ll concede defeat for now. I thought that if we could snatch up some Land Dragon materials, it would give us a chance at an audience with Ludmila, you know.”

The surrounding women listened to his words in fascination.

The robe covering his body lost its effect, and when Larc tossed it

aside, a few competed to scramble for it.

With a large black sword over his back, Larc…

“Well, I’m sure the chance will come someday. I’ll just wait it out until then… until the day I become king of this country. As long as I can get Ludmila to fall for me, the rest is all mine.”

Larc walked off towards where his horse was tethered, and his women followed along…

❼

… Inside the Jewel.

With the appearance of attackers, there were four gathered to think over their goal.

Third, Fourth, Fifth, Seventh. They surrounded the round table, giving their forecast on the enemy.

『Personally, from the information Lyle received, it’s probably that young adventurer, isn’t it?』

On the Third’s opinion, those around nodded. The Fourth removed his glasses, and began wiping off the lenses.

『I’ll bet. He had some sort of Skill to charm his opponents. No, I do get the feeling it’s limited to the opposite gender, thought.』

The Fifth, even knowing that, didn’t seem to have any interest in the young adventurer himself.

『Did he move by Celes’ orders, or someone around her? If he’s doing it on his own, that makes it nice and simple.』

The Seventh sounded annoyed.

『If we only had the time, we would be in the middle of beating him to a pulp. But we’ve sure found a troublesome one in Cartaffs. I do think it’s best we take him down while we’re here.』

Rather than troublesome, it was a dangerous Skill. What's more, no matter how they looked at it, the one possessing it was a dangerous one as well.

As they wanted to gain Cartaffs' cooperation, they were thinking to get rid of any that would get in the way.

『But we don't have any proof this time around. If Lyle gets rid of him, it'll become a problem. We'll have to get some evidence, but…』

After the Third had said that much, within the Jewel… the conference room, came the sound of an opening door.

Everyone looked around. At that very moment, all the members were already gathered. It wasn't thinkable that anyone would be opening the door to their memories.

And their four sets of eyes turned to Lyle's room of memories.

From it, a single woman stepped out.

It wasn't Celes. She woman more mature than Lyle's sister looked to be in her twenties. The first to react was the Fifth. He stood from his seat, looked at the woman, and opened his eyes wide.

『… Milleia, why are you here?』

Seeing the Fifth wipe off his sweat, the remaining three stood, and strengthened their guard. As that was happening, the woman with long, wavy, violet hair sent a look from her golden eyes around the room.

Clothed in white, she raised the hem of her skirt to give a polite greeting.

Milleia Walt… or perhaps Milleia Circry was not an owner of the Walt House's Jewel.

It was strange of her to exist in this space.

Milleia opened her mouth.

『It is a pleasure to be of your acquaintance, Third Generation Head Sleigh-sama, Fourth Generation Head Max-sama, and Seventh

Generation Head Brod-sama. It has been a while, father.』

An appearance similar to Miranda.

But an atmosphere more mature and calm than even her. The woman's golden eyes were the same Demon Eyes that Shannon possessed.

『I am Milleia. Milleia Walt. Since this room's owner, Lyle, has yet to even attempt to step inside, I am the one called forth to guide him. Among those of the Walt House, I was deemed most worthy, it seems.』

The ancestors within the Jewel were beings of memory, without exception. They had wills, but it's not as if their souls were sealed inside.

And Milleia standing before them was the same. The woman herself had died, and this was an entity made of memory…

But that was strange. Milleia and the Jewel… it was a blue gem at the time, but the two had never once come into contact.

The Seventh opened his mouth.

『A guide, you say? Coming out of the room of memories, something like that is…』

Completely ignoring their confusion, Milleia spoke with a smile.

『There is a need for Lyle to know everything. That is the Jewel's will. It will be troublesome if he continued to neglect it.』

When she spoke of the Jewel's will, the ancestors' confusion only grew.

The Third muttered.

『The Jewel's will? What could that…』

Milleia (ノ´∀`*): "I came out."

Fifth Generation Head (；゜Д゜): "I-I see?"

Fourth Generation Head (;-@∀@): “W-what about my wife!? She’s not coming out, right! Right!?”

???|д゜) *Stare* : “I came.”

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